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Neverwinter Nights

We forcibly strapped Steve Polak into a giant catapult and shot him far over the Pacific to Edmonton, Canada for a personal hands-on with the RPG that could just about usher in a new Golden Age of gaming on the PC. How? Read our in-depth preview and find out!



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We Are Not Alone

Multiplayer gaming. It's history is not as short as you might think, so we bought Timothy C Best a brand new Time Machine and a Guy Pearce doll.



STRIDENT

There's nothing better than a righteous Smackdown. So that's why Daniel Wilks has taken an exclusive first look at this upcoming gem



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SIMS VACATION

Will the Sims ever die? Will EA just keep bringing out piecemeal expansions every quarter? Will the Sims Online destroy the world? Agata finds out...



TONY HAWK PRO SKATER 3

Yeah we've played it on PS2, Gamecube and Xbox but it's PC where this extreme title really shines. Or does it? To port or not to port...



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3D HISTORY

As we welcome our new Deputy Editor Jere Lawrence, we unleash him on his favourite topic: 3D Tech. Find out where we've been, and where we're going.



ATI CARD ROUNDUP

As if six pages of history wasn't enough 3D tech, here's some more. Six ATi cards go head to head. Are they a real NVIDIA alternative?

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CD & DVD GUIDE

All the latest cool stuff: demos, mods and patches!
Now with added Dungeon Siege!

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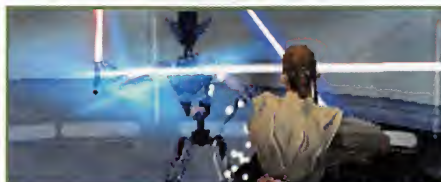
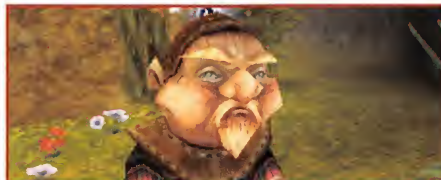
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ACN 002 647 645
ISSN 1326-5644

PRINTED BY Webstar

DISTRIBUTED BY

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Changing of the Guard



Change - it's our constant companion. As many readers may have noticed over the past few months we have been steadily changing the guard here at PCPP. It began of course with my good self back on PCPP#66, taking over from David Wildgoose.

Then, we brought on board Daniel Wilks as our News Editor, a fine man with a keen eye for detail and crazy news stories (the mac bong from PCPP#74 anyone?) and John Dewhurst moved into the Deputy's position. Now, John has moved on to a lucrative and high-profile musical career (the vagaries of showbiz permitting) but remains as a valued and experienced freelance contributor.

Stepping into his boots we find a member of the old, old guard, Jere Lawrence. Jere's name first appeared in the 'skite box' (on the left) way back on PCPP#1. That's right, he was here for the launch, and he stuck around as Tech Editor and CD Producer for a whopping 38 issues. Then he took a well-deserved break for a couple of years and now 2002 finds him back in the chair, this time as Deputy. Naturally, having someone with Jere's amount of experience and history with the mag will do us all good - me, you, the games and most importantly, hardware. Hardware is Jere's first love and his speciality - take a look at his absolutely exhaustive History of 3D Accelerators starting on page 78. And remember, when Jere refers to a review we did way back in PCPP#16, he was the

guy who wrote that review.

But PCPP is not just created by we brave few here in the offices of Sunny Redfern. Our freelance contributors are a vital part of the magazine. So it's great to see such PCPP old boys as Timothy C Best and George Soropos still pounding out the quality words so many years after they first appeared in the mag. But there are some new faces to welcome as well.

Victor Webster is our expert sports and racing reviewer and you already sampled his work last month in our GP4 preview. Derek Lee, an experienced freelancer for other titles, now also offers his expertise to PowerPlay, and we are the richer for it. Toward the back of the magazine, Stuart Calvin is our new Setup man and absolute disagree-at-your-peril tech guru. Read his stuff, and not only will you be informed, you'll also be a little scared. Finally, Asher Moses also joins the tech team, with an acid tongue and a benchmarking rig to match.

Finally, please welcome Karl Mayerhofer. He corrects our spelling. And he does a mighty fine job.

PowerPlay is about games and hardware, but it's also about people. We're a big team, but we're a close team, and our singular aim is to continue bringing you the best gaming and hardware related magazine good money can buy.

Now read on...

Anthony Fordham
Editor
anthonyf@next.com.au



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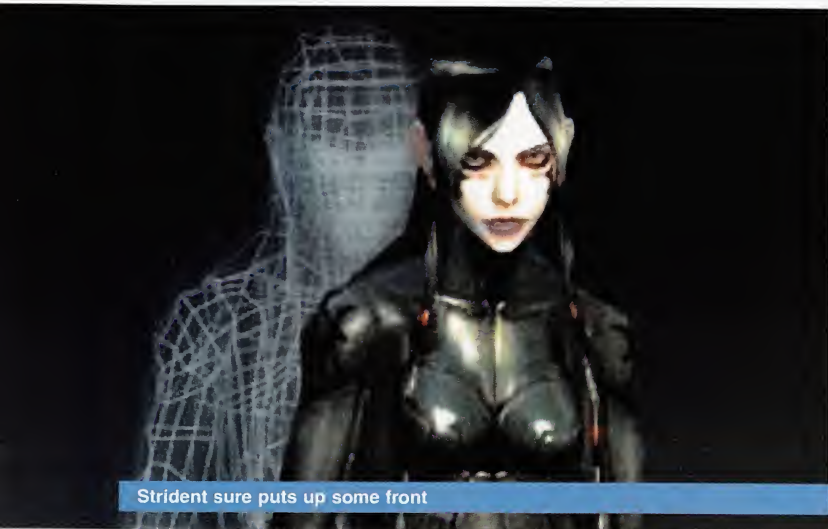
GO ABOVE THE CALL WITH THE PC GAME OF THE YEAR



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Strident sure puts up some front



Pity they don't make men like they used to

Strident: The Shadow Front

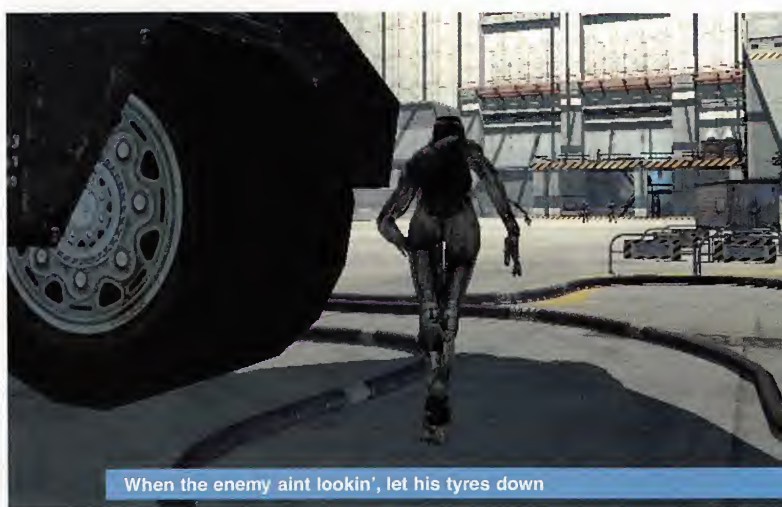
Another babe, another beat-down



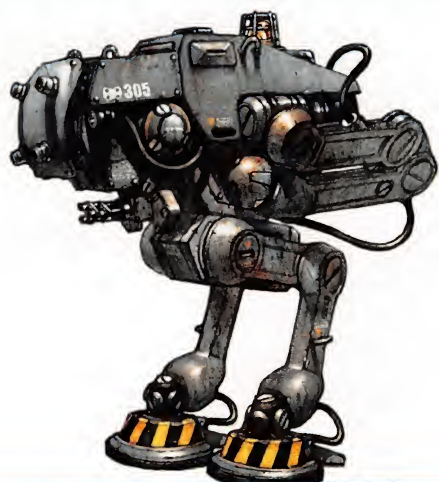
Hey dude, I just shot a pigeon. Preheat the oven.



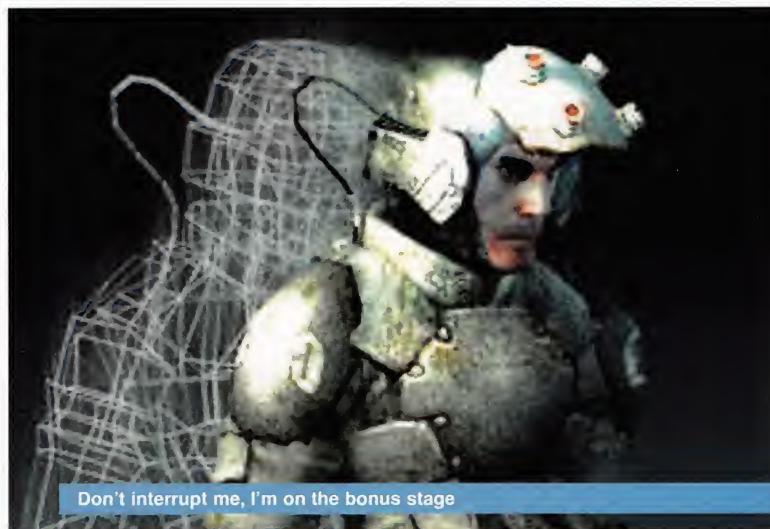
Bart Simpson on steroids



When the enemy aint lookin', let his tyres down



My brother was in Mech Warrior, you know



Don't interrupt me, I'm on the bonus stage

■ Developer: Phantagram Interactive ■ Publisher: Phantagram Interactive ■ Distributor: N/A ■ Due: 4th Quarter 2002

Move over Konoko, there's a new babe in town ready to place so much foot in arse that it will make the former look like a slacker. Strident, the newest planned release from Korean developers, Phantagram Interactive (famous for Kingdom Under Fire) revolves around the exploits of an as yet unnamed female agent of FIST, a special peace-keeping service. Captured after a disastrous mission in the Middle East and MIA for six months, our femme fatale gets a chance to escape when an evil mercenary team attacks the facility in which she is being held captive. As can be readily assumed the heroine goes on to kick some serious booty, discover an alarming conspiracy and either save or destroy the world.

Primarily the game will be third person action, somewhat in the mould of Oni with the protagonist running around shooting people, performing acrobatics, placing fist and foot in enemy face and generally acting in a pretty antisocial manner. Unlike Oni, Strident will also support a first person view for sniping.

The story will evolve through 20 or so single player missions, each with about 30 minutes of playtime. Different scenarios may call for sabotage, demolitions, protection, assassination, stealth or serious combat - each style of game requiring a different style of play. Each mission will be introduced in a cut scene after which the player will be able to outfit their character with the equipment they think will be necessary. Different weapons will greatly effect the strengths of the character so Strident should offer a good deal of replayability in that respect.

Squad-Based Shenanigans

Although the game is single player there will be a number of squad-based missions included. The squad will be AI controlled but Phantagram is quick to point out that the emphasis of these missions will be teamwork rather than having the AI NPCs simply acting as backup. Throughout the course of the game the player will encounter many different, obviously anime-inspired enemies

ranging from genetic freaks to battlemechs, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. To combat these enemies the main character will have access to devastating martial arts skills, high tech guns, graceful acrobatics and the ability to perform Matrix-esque wall jumps.

We haven't seen the game in motion yet but the early screen shots and renders look amazing, detailing a dark post WWII landscape riddled with the ruins of a broken industrial machine. The design looks to be a mesh of anime and some more Western sci-fi influences with Heavy Metal instantly springing to mind - besides, any game featuring the exploits of a hottie goth chick in skin tight leather automatically has something good going for it. Scheduled for release in late 2002, Strident - The Shadow Front should hit our shelves around Christmas, re-invigorating the third person action genre and bringing another sex symbol to our PC screens.

Daniel Wilks

Why Strident: The Shadow Front Deserves a Second Look:

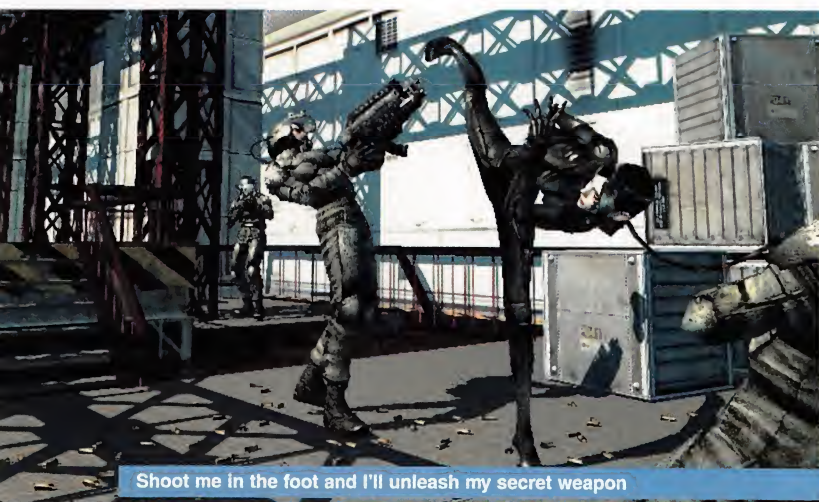


Hottie goth chicks in lots of leather

Like Oni, only more so

Both singleplayer and squad-based combat

Lots of righteous beat-downs



Shoot me in the foot and I'll unleash my secret weapon



What I can't see can't hurt me, right?



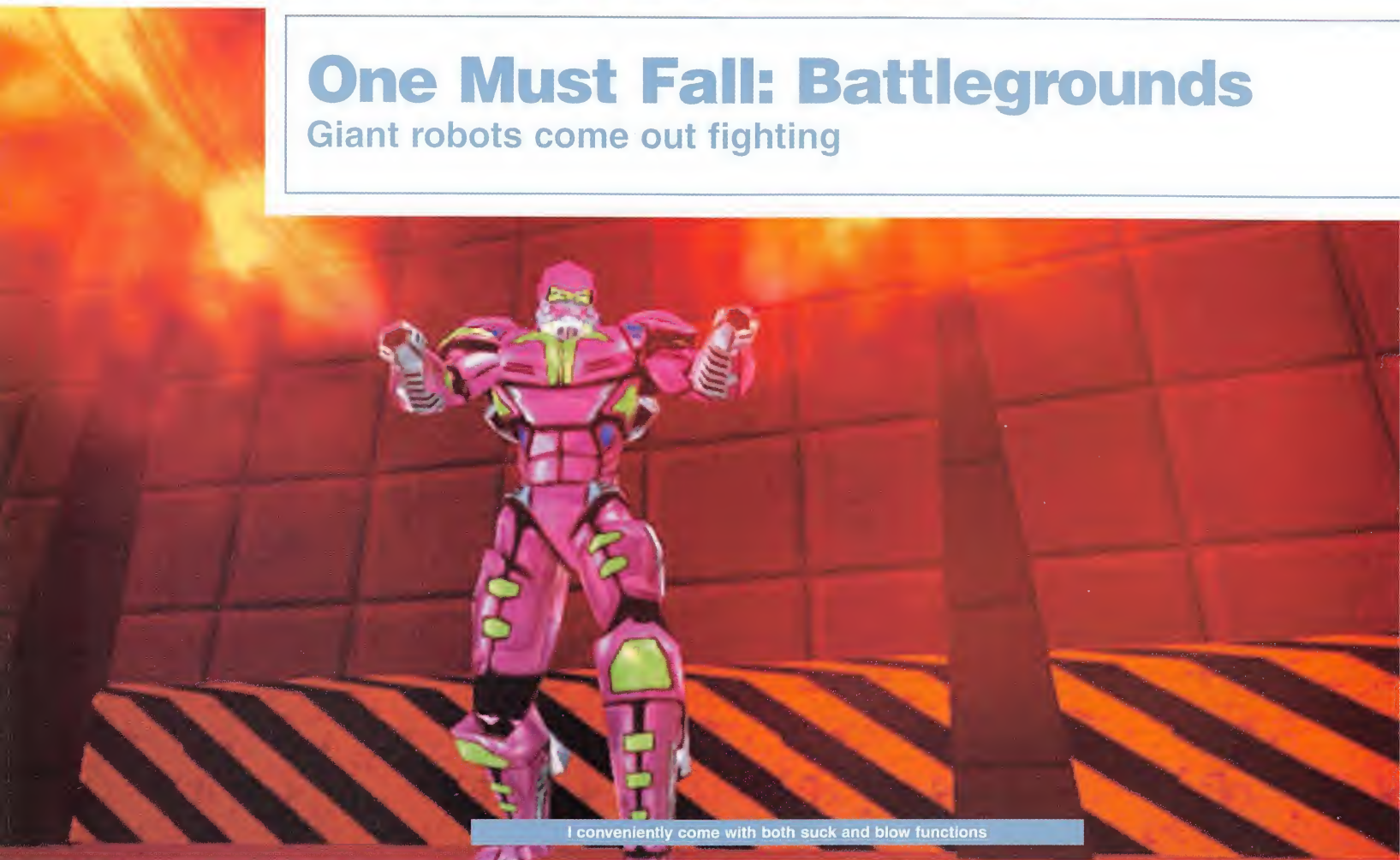
Twisting down at the mech discotheque



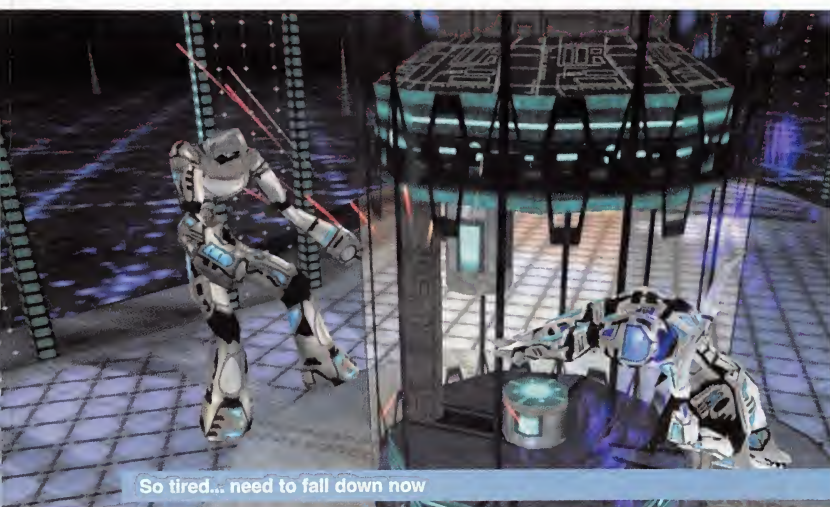
Don't make me yell so hard, goddamnit

One Must Fall: Battlegrounds

Giant robots come out fighting



I conveniently come with both suck and blow functions



So tired... need to fall down now



Learn to kick robot butt in three easy steps



Kick baddies while they're down



These titanium alloy shoes... are longing to stray ...

■ Developer: Diversions Entertainment ■ Publisher: TBA ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Due: TBA

Like our Japanese brethren, the West is beginning to respect the majesty and awesome power of giant robots. Long the mainstay of many an anime, live action movie, manga or computer game, giant robots are coming back to a computer near you with the imminent release of *One Must Fall: Battlegrounds*. The game is the sequel to the greatest PC fighter of all time, *One Must Fall: 2097*. Gone are the days of 2D side view robots - now we have fully 3D interactive environments, 3D rendered robots and a third person view. Though the plot hasn't been released at this stage (if there even is one), *Battlegrounds* will most probably take the tried and tested route of arena battle leading to the final confrontation with the big mean boss.

Punch me in the brain!

Fighting games have never really had a large market on the PC, sticking to consoles and the occasional port, but *Battlegrounds* looks like it may put an end to that. The power of PC

graphics will be harnessed to produce a fighting game that stands alone in terms of look and gameplay. The player will take the role of the pilot of an enormous combat robot, and fight it out in vast arenas. Instead of simple one on one battles, OMF: *Battlegrounds* can support multiple players with no real upper limit apart from server specifications (too many players would cause far too much lag to be fun) making for some huge free-for-all altercations. The game will have both an online multiplayer mode and singleplayer so you can get your practice in at home.

Due to the nature of the combat players will either have to use keyboard or gamepad for control as there are four movement and six action buttons. Mouse and keyboard commands will not be accepted due to the nature of the game - while this is likely to aggravate a number of gamers, it is a conscious decision on the part of the developer. All of the arenas will feature a total freedom of movement within the boundaries, allowing players to go anywhere and fight whoever they

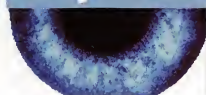
want. There is no lock-on key so players can attack whoever they want at any time.

Robot Love

Much like in the first game, players choose a pilot and robot, complimenting the pilot's abilities with the strengths of his vehicle. Unlike the first game, players are now free to create their own character with a selection of different portraits (personal images can also be ported in) and customisable statistics. Unfortunately the robots cannot be customised or upgraded between bouts - only the paint job can be modified. Each of the robots will have a number of special moves much like a console fighter and some secret 'demolition' moves (similar to fatalities in *Mortal Kombat*). The last bit of good news about OMF: *Battlegrounds* is that the game will be mod friendly, making it the first fighting game that can make that boast. *One Must Fall: Battlegrounds* is still looking for a publisher so we still may have a while to wait for giant robot mayhem.

Daniel Wilks

Why One Must Fall: Battlegrounds Deserves a Second Look:



Giant robots rock!

Total freedom of movement

Massive online robot wars

Customisable characters



Punching yourself in the face won't get you anywhere



Blasters at twenty paces

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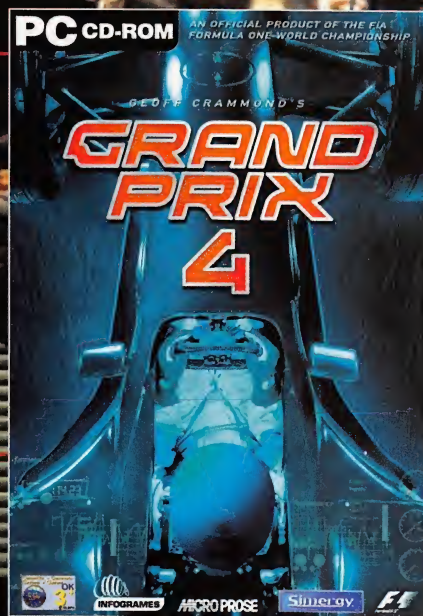
Neverwinter Nights PC (M15+). 10898



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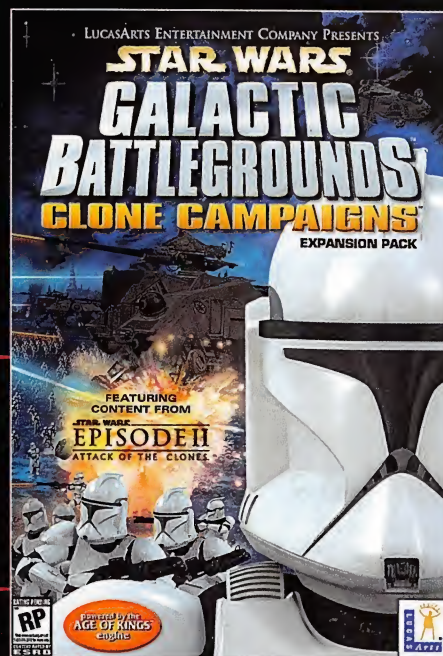
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BYTESIZE



VIRTUAL ACTUALITY

Technology company Actuality Systems has released a range of virtual 3D display units. Capable of displaying high resolutions with millions of colours, the machine gives anyone with enough money the ability to recreate the "help me Obi Wan" speech from Star Wars in their own home. Hands up who wants one.

INTERNET BRIDES

According to British marriage counseling service, Relate, the Internet is playing a significant role in relationship breakups. One in ten people who go to Relate blame the net for their rocky romances. The solution seems simple. Get your pr0n on video - then you can blame the TV for your problems.

EVERCRACK OD

21-year-old Wisconsin native, Shawn Woolley was found on Thanksgiving morning by his mother after fatally shooting himself with a handgun. Scattered around the young man's room were copious notes relating to Everquest. It is unknown whether the game played any part in the suicide but, in true American tradition, the mother is suing Sony.

BLACK MAC

In a shed in rural California a secret, one-of-a-kind Mac has been discovered. Dubbed the "Black Mac", the machine is electronically shielded and was probably used by some security or government agency. The origin and use of the machine remains a mystery - Apple has no record that the thing ever existed.

A Blizzard's Coming

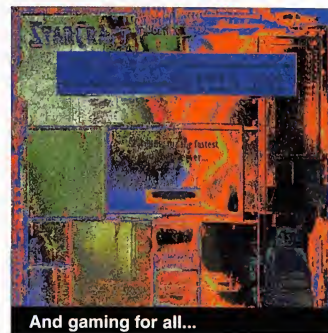
Battle.net on the warpath

Anyone who has ever played a game on the hugely popular gaming service, Battle.net will know that it can be a definite pain. Frequent crashes, slow ping due to the number of players, the social problems of player killers and many cheats plague the service. If you've ever thought something should be done, then you're not alone. Two self-proclaimed geeks, Ross Combs and Rob Crittenden, with the help of a small team of programmers put together a package dubbed "bnetd", a program that which allows players to start their own server and play games such as Starcraft and Diablo II in a friendly, bug-free environment.

For Blizzard, a friendly, bug-free environment isn't the issue. Copyright infringement is. On Feb 19 the game company slapped Combs and Crittenden with a cease and desist email declaring that "bnetd" is "circumvention technology" and that according to the DMCA (Digital Millennium Copyright Act) the program was a violation of Blizzard's copyright. The problem stems from the fact that "bnetd" does not differentiate between legitimate and pirated versions of Blizzard software, whereas Battle.net blocks any player without a licensed copy of the games.

Unable to afford the legal costs the "bnetd" team removed the code from its site but that was not enough for Blizzard. On April 5 the company filed a suit against the host ISP and system administrator claiming the program allowed for unauthorized performances of Blizzard's copyrighted material. It is believed by many that the change in legal action may be a pre-emptive strike designed to protect the upcoming subscription-based service, Worlds of Warcraft. In an email to Salon.com, Michael Morhaim, Blizzard Entertainment's president and co-founder said, "We always have been and will continue to be diligent in protecting our trademarks and copyrighted materials. We are convinced that certain members of the bnetd project illegally copied parts of our code and bypassed the game's CD-Key authentication process. We further believe that emulators damage our efforts to prevent piracy, and they create safe havens for players using illegal copies of our products."

The implication that the creation of "interoperable" software - programs that can interact with other copyrighted programs - is an infringement of copyright is a very dangerous



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idea. Interoperability is a core principle on which the Internet, and indeed most networks operate. If the "bnetd" team loses its case a terrible precedent is set. As Rob Crittenden himself states, "Any company could create their own mini-monopoly on network communications. It could bring down the interoperability of the Internet."

Laying the Smack Down

Games to be used as a political tool

The re-election committee for current Governor of Minnesota, former WWF star Jesse "The Body" Ventura are considering using games as a medium in his upcoming campaign. The games, available on both CD-ROM and downloadable sources, will promote past political victories as well as criticise his opponents. It's unknown what format the games will take but hopefully they will showcase Jesse "The Mind" Ventura (as he is now known since taking office) laying the smack down on his political opponents and striking all kinds of manly poses. Unfortunately the games, which will be distributed free of charge to voters, may be

banned under a Minnesota law that prohibits the giving of gifts or bribes to voters. Ventura has not yet officially decided if he will run for office again but wants to be prepared just in case. No matter the outcome, this is the first time games will be used (or even considered) as a means to promote a political candidate.



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This is a place for carnage. This is HALO™.



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McCANN XBOX32/HALO/E

BYTESIZE



STAR BALLZ-UP

In a strange turn of events, porn production house Media Market Group is slapping George Lucas with a \$140 million lawsuit because the Star Wars mogul claimed that MMG marketed their animated Star Wars porn spoof Star Ballz to kids. Will wonders never cease? It seems not.

THINK INK

According to EE Times magazine, a journal catering to technology and engineering, the future of monitors may be any flexible surface. Through a technique known as electro-optical polymer ink printing a common ink jet printer can feasibly print a viewing surface. The possibilities are endless...

LIQUID CRYSTALS

A research team at UCLA has devised a way to stimulate the molecular action of crystalline substances so they can behave as both solids and liquids. Practical usage of this technology may allow for true 3D TV in as little as 10 years and light-driven computers millions of times faster than current PCs.

WIRELESS MONITORS

ViewSonic will soon be releasing a range of wireless monitors to the general public. These monitors, using Microsoft "Mira" technology will be able to roam up to about 50' from a PC and can be used as a touch pad for simple data entry and web browsing.

Costumed Crusaders

Masked vigilantes invading a PC near you

A quick glance at the state of modern entertainment (film/TV/gaming) will tell you that superheroes are taking over. They're invading just about every walk of life. Around 20 comic adaptations are coming to the big screen in the next 18 months - ranging from well known characters such as Batman, Spiderman, Daredevil and The Hulk to little known or independently published characters such as Hell Boy, Black Panther and The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen. If that's not enough to keep the fans happy, the news of Spiderman The Movie: The Game (which has to be one of the clunkiest titles ever), should bolster spirits.

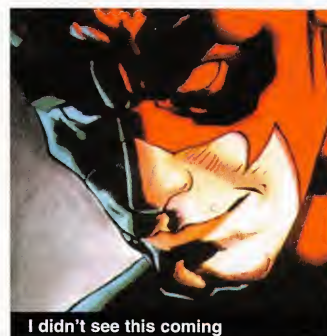
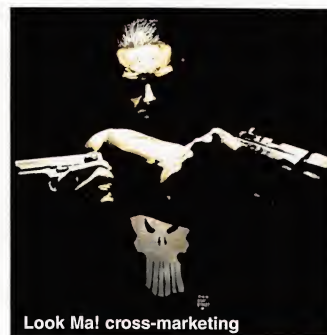
THQ has recently announced that it has gone into an exclusive partnership with Marvel Enterprises to produce official games of the comic giant's characters up to the year 2007. The exclusive deal gives THQ the rights to all comic, film and TV characters to develop for all viable platforms. A further coup came in the form of the companies teaming up for The Call, a new comic slated for 2003.

"Working with Marvel not only on rich properties like The Punisher but in jointly creating a brand-new property like The Call

is a huge win for THQ as we continue to execute on our strategy of bringing the best gaming content to market," stated Germaine Gioia, THQ vice president of licensing. "THQ looks forward to tapping into the essence of these characters from their comic book roots and creating true digital experiences that reflect Marvel's future plans for the franchises."

"Marvel is looking forward to a true partnership," said Bill Jemas, President and COO, Marvel Enterprises, Inc. "THQ's top developers will work closely with Marvel's best creators to produce the most exciting games on the market. We are especially excited about jointly developing The Call - an all-new property about real-world heroism."

"This deal has come together during an especially exciting time for these Marvel brands," stated Russ Brown, Executive Vice President, Marvel Enterprises, Inc. "Rolling Stone just declared Nick Fury the 'certified cool' comic book of 2001, The Punisher has been outselling Batman ever since its 2000 re-launch and, based on initial orders from comic shops, Captain America will be the top selling comic in America this May - right in the middle of the Spider-Man movie hype."



Source Code Released

FreeSpace 2 just became a little more free

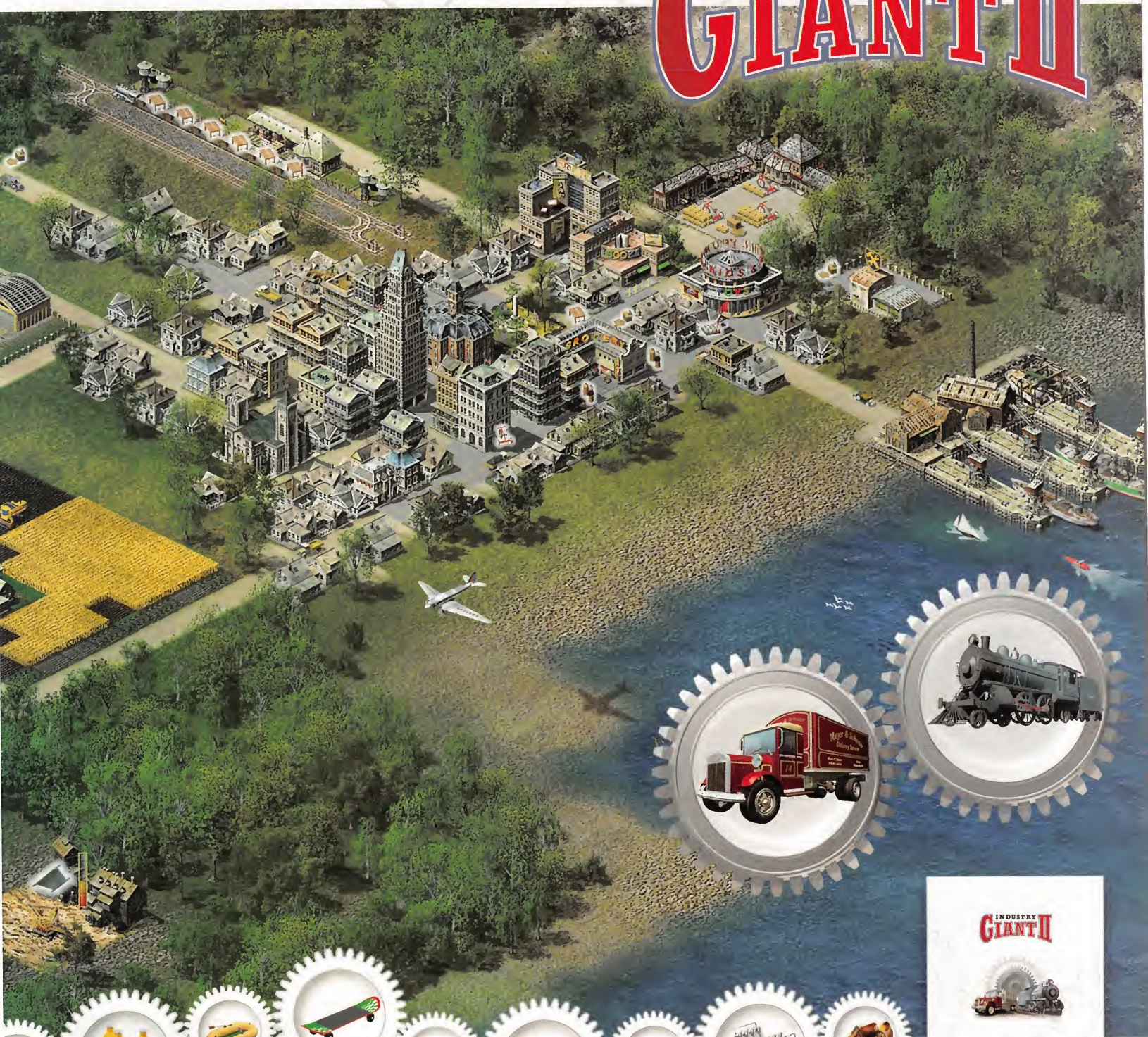
It's time for the mod development community to rejoice. Volition software, Developers of the multiple award winning space simulation, FreeSpace 2 has just publicly released the game's source code. The uncompiled source code will allow the mod community to drastically alter the game and create its own custom content. Since its release in 1999, FreeSpace 2 has been considered by many to be the be all and end all of space simulations and has been used as something of a benchmark to which all others are compared. We ourselves scored the game a massive 95%, one of the highest scores we have ever given. The massive popularity of

the game should mean that it will soon rank up there with Half-Life and Quake 3 as one of the most frequently and enthusiastically modded games on the net. We can't wait to see what the mod community will come up with.



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- Detailed production processes and seasonally dependant product cycles add to the realism
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BYTESIZE



MUSICAL FASHION

German company Infineon Technologies recently launched the first in their range of "smart-textile" products. Smart-Textiles are fabrics with components and wiring built-in, making them the first real step to fully wearable technology. The initial product range includes a T-shirt with an MP3 player integrated into the fabric.

MISERY AND MAYHEM

3D0 has confirmed reports that the company has made a number of New World Computing employees redundant. NWC, responsible for such titles as Heroes of Might & Magic and the Might & Magic series of RPGs will essentially no longer exist, though it will continue to provide updates and patches.

THINKING CAP

Two Australian boffins have created what could be the first actual "thinking cap". The device, which uses magnetic impulses to temporarily shut down the left hemisphere of the brain, effectively simulates the brain wave patterns of idiot savants. If you want to be like Dustin Hoffman in Rain Man, here's your chance.

BAD SPACE

According to Joel Primack, professor of Physics at UCLA the implementation of the Star Wars orbital defense program could seriously jeopardize any further exploration of space, as well as endangering currently orbiting satellites. The program has the potential to place a lot of debris in orbit - anything larger than a speck of dust has the potential to do serious damage.

Gates Antitrust Warning

World's richest nerd takes the witness stand

On Monday 22nd April, Microsoft chairman Bill Gates took to the witness stand and warned that antitrust sanctions being brought against the company by nine States would cripple Microsoft and set the computer industry back ten years. Gates stated that the sanctions, which propose a version of Windows that can be customised by computer makers and rival software designers, would "undermine the success of all three elements of Microsoft's success, causing great damage to Microsoft, other companies that

build upon Microsoft's products, and the businesses and consumers who use PC software". He also went on to state that it would freeze the development of Windows, as it would deny Microsoft any incentive to make continual improvements. Gates himself credits Windows as a contributing factor in uniting the once fragmented PC industry. "By reducing Windows to some undefined 'core operating system' the [States] would turn back the clock on Windows development by about ten years and effectively freeze it there," he said.



Ah, boogy, boogy, boogy, boogy...



Seems he's made another billion

Nvidia Vs Microsoft

Possible sequel to Clash of the Titans?

Nvidia is currently in arbitration with Microsoft over the price of the graphics chips the former company produces for the Xbox. The case comes less than two weeks after Microsoft lowered the price of the console on the European and Australian markets by a staggering 38% and lowered its own fiscal 2002 Xbox sales by 40%. Jen-Hsun Huang of Nvidia stated, "We're delighted we have a wonderful relationship with Microsoft and are working on many fronts together, and the arbitration is

just a step in an overall process in resolving this thing." He added, "In the meantime we're recognizing the difference between what Microsoft is paying and the price it believes it should be paying as deferred revenues." It seems that the graphics chip-manufacturing giant has come up around \$13 million short in the last fiscal year but the company currently puts this down to "deferrals pending the arbitration ruling".



Nvidia haggle with the big boys



What a geek!

Opening the Xbox

Cans of worms found inside

A new book called *Opening the Xbox: Inside Microsoft's plan to Unleash an Entertainment Revolution* alleges that Bill Gates' powerhouse, not simply content with trying to purchase Sega, offered \$25 billion for the Nintendo trademark. The book goes on to quote Nintendo's US president Minoru Arakawa. "[We] weren't sure what to think when Microsoft made the offer. I was surprised, we didn't need the money. I thought it was a joke." The book then goes on to state, "Some Nintendo executives seemed interested and the

meetings went on through the winter." The parties met six or seven times. Microsoft wanted Nintendo to drop its GameCube console and get behind the Xbox. But Hiroshi Yamauchi, the aging CEO and Nintendo, didn't like the idea. By January 2000, the talks were over." The news can be taken in one of two ways - either that Nintendo managed to stay free from the evil grip of Microsoft, or that the Xbox wouldn't be saddled with the supposedly "kiddie games" developed by Nintendo. You be the judge.



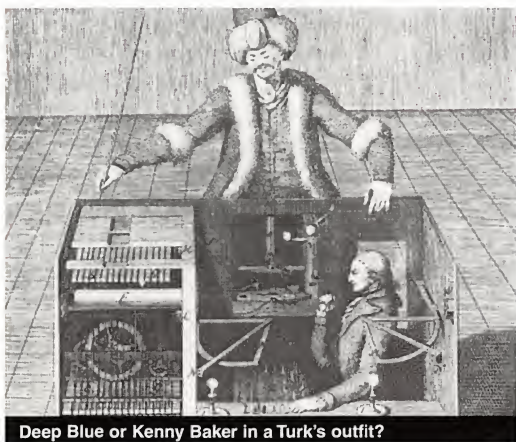
Microtendo XCube?



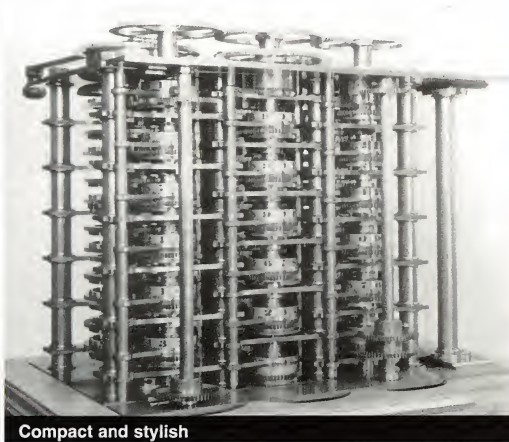
Ninsoft Gamebox?

Difference in Design

How a chess playing robot inspired the first computer



Deep Blue or Kenny Baker in a Turk's outfit?



Compact and stylish

Many people in the gaming community have heard of inventor Charles Babbage, the designer of the first mechanical computational machine, the Difference Engine. Although the machine was never finished (Babbage went on to design far more complex 'thinking machines', none of which ever saw the light of day), it is credited as the machine that gave birth to the modern PC, the machine we use in our daily lives for work and entertainment. What many people don't know is that Babbage himself was inspired by a gaming machine - a wonderful scam which took the world by storm in the 18th and 19th centuries: a hoax known to the astonished public simply as The Turk.

On a fine autumn day in 1769 a polite civil servant, well versed in the sciences of hydraulics, physics and mechanics,

In front of an awe struck crowd, Kempelen unveiled a life size mannequin of the upper body of a man dressed in full Turkish regalia, perched on top of a large wooden box. To prove no one was hiding inside the box or body, von Kempelen opened a number of compartments and shined a light through. Satisfied that it was not a hoax the audience was told that The Turk was a chess-playing automaton. Kempelen announced to the audience that he had created the first thinking machine, capable of playing chess and winning against almost any opponent. The first man beaten by the mechanical marvel was a courtier by the name of Count Cobenzl. Kempelen explained that due to the nature of the mechanics used the machine would have to play the white pieces and must move first. After moving its head as if to survey the board, the Turk made its first move and defeated

Europe. Theories abounded as to how the creation worked, ranging from legless midgets hiding in hidden compartments to hidden levers and more outlandish claims that somehow von Kempelen controlled the automata with a magnet in his pocket. After Wolfgang von Kempelen died the machine was bought by a creator of mechanical toys and entertainment automata, Johann Maelzel and continued to tour, playing against a number of famous personages, most notably Napoleon Bonaparte. The French Emperor tried to fool the machine by deliberately moving pieces wrongly but was absolutely delighted when the Turk ended the game by sweeping the pieces onto the floor in disgust.

It was around this time that a young engineer named Charles Babbage played against the machine. Although he readily admitted the machine was a hoax he credited it with spawning the idea that it was truly possible to create a chess playing, analytical machine. He set about to prove the theory. The Difference Engine and lesser known Analytical Engine were the result.

The general assumption was that the Turk contained cleverly designed secret compartments enabling a small, spy person to maneuver themselves around inside so as not to be seen, though where von Kempelen and Maelzel after him found a chess champion midget is anyone's guess. The invention of the computer may have been based on a hoax, but what a wonderful hoax it was.

"In Paris the Turk played two games against Benjamin Franklin and beat him soundly both times."

Wolfgang von Kempelen, was summoned to the court of Empress Maria Theresa of Austria-Hungary to witness a magic show. The Empress wanted to see what a man of science would make of a show of illusion. What Wolfgang saw would change his life. So disappointed in the show was the normally quiet von Kempelen that he dismissed the entire performance with a wave of his hand and claimed in front of the entire court that he could do better. Maria Theresa amused by the boast charged von Kempelen to do better and gave him six months leave to prove his claim.

the Count in less than half an hour. The clockwork man stunned the audience with what seemed to be a mind far more analytical than that of a human. Wolfgang von Kempelen was the toast of the courts.

Wolfgang soon took the show on the road, touring initially through Europe and then further abroad. In Paris the Turk played two games against Benjamin Franklin and beat him soundly both times. It suffered defeat against a French man by the name of Philidor but that wasn't a great surprise - Philidor was widely recognised as the greatest chess player in all of

CONSOLIDATION



GAMECUBE

With the recent announcement of the 38% price drop of the Xbox on the Australian and European markets, Nintendo has dropped the price of its next generation console from \$399 AUD to \$329 AUD. Whilst the price drop is only minimal compared to that of the Xbox, the \$329 price tag puts the console back in the lowest price bracket. How this will effect sales at this point is unknown, but the forecast is definitely very positive. In other news, Panasonic and Nintendo are teaming up to release a hybrid machine combining the Nintendo console and a Panasonic DVD player. It is unknown whether these machines will be available worldwide or just in Japan but most of us here at PCPP hope they are released domestically. They look incredibly swank and feature a shiny stainless steel chassis and appear to be only slightly larger than the standard GameCube.



PLAYSTATION 2

Some details have been leaked as to what consumers can expect from the eagerly anticipated PS3. Featuring a chip co-designed by IBM and Toshiba, the PS3 has (on paper at least) the potential to be by far the most powerful and advanced console gaming machine yet.

Meanwhile, there has been no word yet as to whether the price of the PS2 will drop in response to those of the Xbox and GameCube but it can be safely assumed that we should see a fairly significant price cut by mid year. Elsewhere the release date for the most anticipated online PS2 game, Everquest Online Adventures, is slowly creeping up. Set around 500 years before the PC version, Everquest Online Adventures will feature 14 character classes and numerous races. It will be a subscription based service and should be up and running in early 2003.

WEBBED FEET



BOOKS

Phantom Zone

www.phantomzone.com.au

The best comic shop in NSW bar none also has a great website detailing upcoming comic releases, industry news and other cool stuff to read. If you're a comic book fan it's a must see - if you're not then it's high time you started. They're good people and deserve your support (Maybe the owner is his brother? - Ed).

BUSINESS

Republic Console

republic-console.00page.com/index.html

Broken English and no idea whatsoever about gaming make the homepage of the Republic Console one of the greats. In the designers own words "You like a company that is better than PS2 and Gamecube this is the site has better than the Emotion Engine and faster than it so check it out and it review".

COMPUTERS

[Guide to Breaking Your Computer members.aol.com/spoons1000/break/index.html](http://members.aol.com/spoons1000/break/index.html)

Watch in awe as some drunken looking redneck guy does what we all want to do sometimes and systematically smashes his computer. The design of the site isn't the greatest but his writing style, maniacal expressions and handy hints make it a must see site. Keyboard + electric drill = hilarity.

CULTURE

[Scoring for Shooting Sprées www.ee0r.com/killings.html](http://www.ee0r.com/killings.html)

In our modern world of convenience and spree killing it's nice to see that some good folks have put together a convenient way to score different spree killings. It may be more than a little disturbing in its ho-hum attitude to death but it's funny nonetheless.

Online: Dungeon Siege

The Lands of Dungeon Siege www.thelandofds.com/

Chris Taylor set about making the most mod-friendly game of all time with Dungeon Siege and with the amount of sites popping up dealing with DS mods it appears as though he has succeeded. Though there are many sites dedicated to the subject, due to its straightforward style and clear content, the Lands of Dungeon Siege is definitely one of the best. Dealing exclusively with modding and world building, Lands of Dungeon Siege contains FAQs, useful links, information and tools to download, as well as a number of AI mods.

For anyone who thought that the character and enemy AI in Dungeon Siege was a little weak then you can download some fresh mods that can

drastically change gameplay. One mod makes AI characters drink potions automatically and run away from battle if they run out of potions, whilst another means that monsters can now use potions, will chase you further and try to attack magic users first. The game may have only been out for a relatively short while but some happy little campers have already been busy working away to make improvements.

There are no new worlds or full mods online as yet but you can find links to a huge number of planned projects to see the absolutely amazing scope of imagination that gamers possess - everything from Tolkien to post-apocalyptic to something based on Stephen King's "The Shining" is represented. If you have an



interest in getting into the mod scene, have a mod of your own you'd like to publicise, are looking to download another world or are simply curious about what is going on with Dungeon Siege then LoDS is your one stop shop. It may look a bit bare at the moment but with the excitement the game is currently generating it shouldn't remain that way for long.



GAMES

Al Menconi Ministries

www.almenconi.com/topics/games/index.html

Al Menconi, a creepy looking minister, helps families come together in God by showing how evil, immoral and downright Satanic a number of PC games actually are. He also answers the age old question that's been troubling religious types for years - "Does God follow us into Cyberspace?"



MOVIES

William Shatner Acting Simulator

www.hecklers.com/simshatner/simshatner.php3

Is there anyone who can truly say that they hate William Shatner? I think not. In any case, now you can have all the fun of being J. T. Kirk on your PC with a scarily realistic Shatner simulator. Fun for all and good to the last slave-girl (you'll understand).



MUSIC

Threebrain

threebrain.com

Home of some of the greatest and most disturbing flash animated songs anywhere on the Internet. Marvel at the musical genius of "WEEEEEEEE!", "Hypothermia" and "School Bus". Words can't describe the weirdness of these songs or the images that go along with them. Take a gander and be amazed.



PEOPLE

Bibleman

www.bibleman.com/

Does anyone remember the show Charles in Charge? In the program, Scott Baio had a chubby off-sider named Willie Aimes. Aimes now has a job bringing the word of God to kiddies by dressing up like a gay Power Ranger (as if they weren't gay enough) and fighting evil with the power of prayer. Priceless.



SCIENCE

Bizarre Stuff You Can Make In Your Kitchen

freeweb.pdq.net/headstrong/

Kind of like that old classic TV program The Curiosity Show, Bizarre Stuff You Can Make In Your Kitchen teaches us valuable science lessons by showing us how to blow things up, melt them, create mini atmospheric disturbances and a whole swag of other fun stuff. A great way to waste time.



SPORT

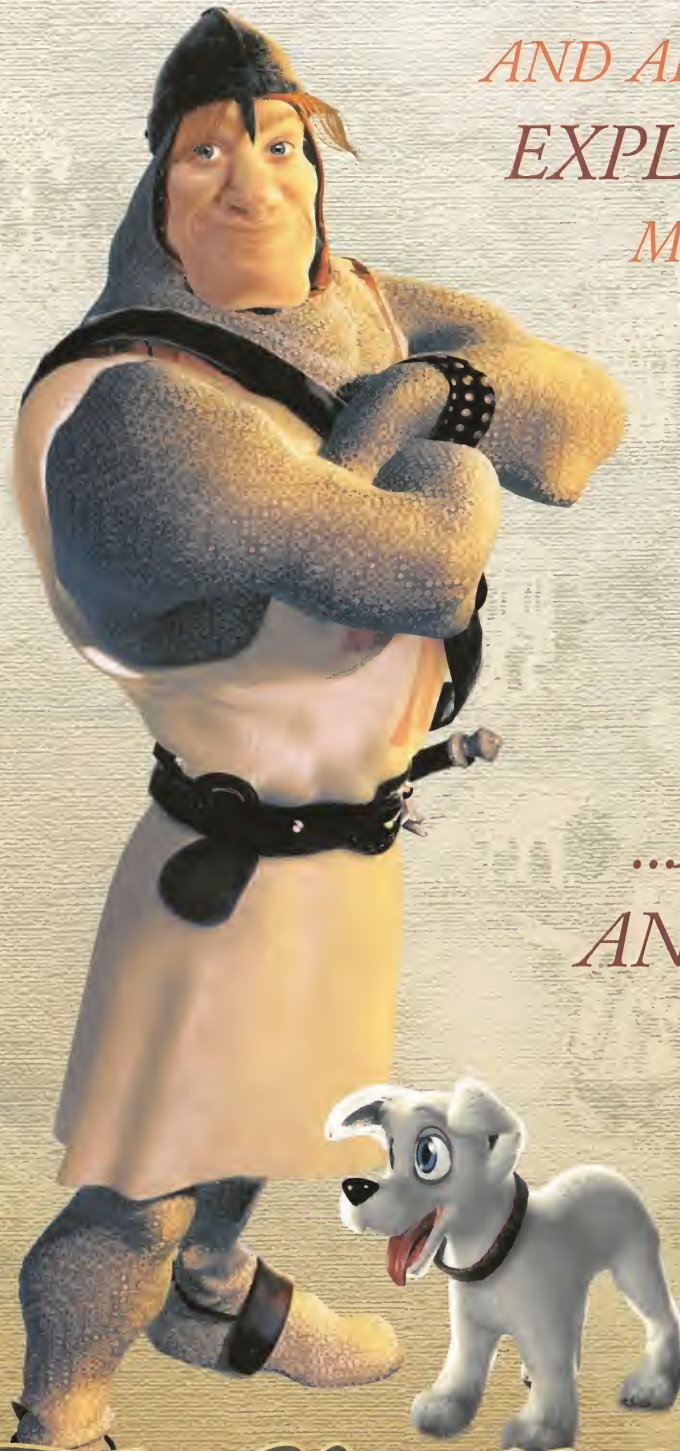
Alexandra Kosteniuk

www.kosteniuk.com/

You'd never really think of chess as a glamorous sport but newcomer Alexandra Kosteniuk is set to put an end to that. The 17-year-old grandmaster has been described as the Anna Kournikova of chess and has been modeling as a way to increase interest in the game.

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MEET NEW PEOPLE...*

*...AND FACE AN
ANCIENT THREAT!*



CULTURES 2

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G 8+
Low Level
Animated
Violence

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FUNATICS
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BYTESIZE



HALO FOR PC

PC owners enamoured with Halo fear not. Microsoft has announced The Xbox flagship title will be made available for the PC, just no mention of when. Microsoft were also tight lipped about changes to the game but hinted that the PC version should have more to it than just higher resolutions.

PCIE VIDEO CARD

Nvidia has announced that it's collaborating with the Arapahoe Work Group to help develop the graphics bandwidth capabilities of PCI Express. Nvidia (see main story) has already developed a high-speed graphics interconnect and should be ready for the launch of PCI Express in 2003.

INFO BUYS SHINY

Interplay has found a buyer for its Shiny Entertainment division potentially saving the publisher from financial collapse. Infogrames has agreed to purchase Shiny for approximately \$47 million. As a result, Infogrames will have the exclusive worldwide rights to develop and publish games based on the movie "The Matrix" and its sequels.

LIGHTWAVE 7.5

NewTek has released version 7.5 of LightWave 3D, the popular 3D animation and rendering software used by many gamecos. The version features an expression builder for complex expressions, motion blur and depth-of-field effects, improved Motion Mixer with weighting and blending, coloured shadows and per-light object exclusion.

PCI Express

Third generation I/O architecture

Over the last ten years we have seen incredible and dramatic improvements to CPUs, video cards and memory. As technology continues to improve, the once humble PC has progressed faster than many would have expected. A PC however can only perform as quickly as its slowest component and after ten years the general purpose I/O (input/output) interconnect standard called PCI has reached its limit of performance. It's time to move on to bigger and better things. Enter PCI Express (PCIE), third generation I/O architecture.

PCIE is being designed to ensure that the pace of hardware progression can continue unhindered by a PC's I/O and will oblige CPU speeds that can exceed 10 GHz, or transfer data at 10 Gigabits a second across a LAN.

In developing third generation I/O the primary lesson learnt from PCI is that all data is not created equal. It is more important, for example, to process streaming data first, as late real time data is as useless as no data at all. Quite ingeniously, PCI Express, through the use of a low voltage differential signal,

enables the balanced distribution of bandwidth to those applications that require it the most. This effectively allows your system to prioritise the data on the bus as opposed to doing it all sequentially. Other features include complete backward compatibility with PCI, Hot Plug and Hot Swap support, data integrity and error handling.

Astute readers may be pondering the Hot Plug and Hot Swap aspects of PCIE. This is possible because PCIE allows for external connectivity like USB, but much faster. As can be seen in the illustration, this will allow for new classes of system partitioning where not every device will need to be mounted in the "beige box". Where PCIE should be able to deliver in the realm of PC redesign is in its core and potential speed. Starting at 2.5 Gigabits per second per direction (200MB/s) which is approximately 10/15 times faster than AGP4X, PCIE performance will increase with silicon technology advances to 10 Gigabits per second per direction (800MB/s) even through external PCIE cabling.

For gamers, PCIE is cause to get excited. PCIE Video

Cards will significantly outperform AGP cards, PCIE soundcards will reduce I/O bottlenecks considerably and balanced distribution of bandwidth will allow for smoother online gaming where the delivery and timing of data is paramount. PCIE is due for release late in 2003.

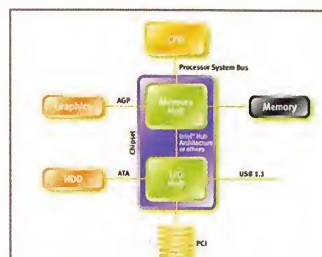
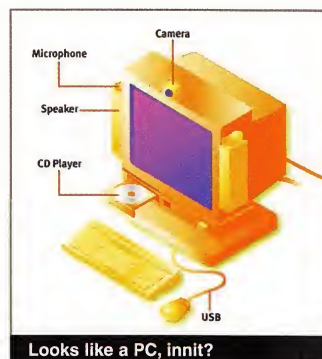


Figure 1. Today's PC has multiple local buses with different requirements

The future



Looks like a PC, innit?

The End for Interplay?

Interplay selling Shiny, warns of bankruptcy

Herve Caen, Interplay's CEO, announced recently that the company is currently in the "advanced stages of negotiations" to sell Shiny Entertainment with the prospective buyer and potential terms of sale not disclosed.

Interplay (Nasdaq : IPLY) whose financial situation is currently quite precarious posted a net loss in 2001 of \$46.3 million. Management cited rising operating costs as the cause for low revenue but a more realistic consideration is that Interplay released 26 titles in 2000 where only 8 titles were released in 2001.

According to Interplay's 2001 annual statement it was reported that while the sale of Shiny is critical to Interplay's survival, it

might not be enough to pull the company from its tailspin.

In a further statement Interplay announced, "There is no assurance that [Interplay] will be able to complete the sale of Shiny, or that the net proceeds from the sale will be sufficient to fund our operations through December 31, 2002. Furthermore, if we are unable to complete the sale of Shiny, we will not have sufficient funds to repay our outstanding liabilities, and no assurances can be given that alternative sources of funding could be obtained on acceptable terms to us, or at all. These conditions, combined with our historical operating losses and our deficits in stockholders' equity and working capital, raise

substantial doubt about our ability to continue as a going concern."

Given such a dire financial forecast the first developer to bail was Bioware who despite intense negotiation has withdrawn publishing rights for Neverwinter Nights and given them to Infogrames instead. Interplay however will retain the publishing rights for Icewind Dale and Baldur's Gate.

Further dramas within Interplay surrounded the resignation of former Chairman and CEO Brian Fargo. Shortly after Fargo's leaving in late January an Interplay company filing revealed a suit against him for allegedly soliciting Interplay employees. A settlement has since been reached.

3Dlabs SOLD

Creative to re-enter graphics card market

Creative Technology LTD (Nasdaq: CREAL) is once again looking to sink its teeth into the Video Card market with the US\$103.7 million purchase of 3Dlabs (Nasdaq: TDDD). The purchase will effectively allow Creative to market a low to medium-end graphics board without needing to purchase a chip from a third party supplier like Nvidia. With the high-end market dominated by ATI and Nvidia the 3Dlabs purchase is not intended to initially compete but to position Creative competitively in the

mid to lower end market.

The Permedia range of cards by 3Dlabs have traditionally only been popular in the business sector but according to Sim Wong Hoo, CEO of Creative, efforts will be made to fulfil power gamers insatiable demand for higher performance graphics capabilities. Already Creative is hinting at a new chipset that, like the GeForce 4 TI4600 can compute faster than a TeraOp (one trillion operations per second).



BYTESIZE



EVERQUEST 2

Verant is busy leaking screenshots for their latest MMORPG, Everquest 2. The new rendering engine is considerably more detailed both in polygon count and textures and even features players and mobs casting realistic shadows. In typical Verant style however players must mount the levelling treadmill again and start from level one.

Almost the Ex-box

Microsoft to repair defective Japanese Xbox units

It would only take one word to undo the years of work and development that Microsoft (NASDAQ: MSFT) has put into the Xbox. That word is "recall". Only recently Microsoft came close to using the brand destroying word after increasing complaints from Japanese consumers over scratched Xbox discs.

Apparently the scratches are caused by abrasion as the discs spin within the Xbox, but it's not clear whether the scratches are the result of user error or faulty placement of the loading trays in some systems. Although some

reports of disc scratching has occurred in the US, Australian and European players have had no problems to report.



AI COMMITTEE

The International Game Developers Association (IGDA) has issued a call for experts to assist with their recently created committee. It will analyse and set up working groups for pathfinding interfaces, steering, influence mapping, decision trees, finite state machines, rule-based systems, goal-oriented action planning, resource handling, and world interfacing.

WARCRAFT FIGURES

Blizzard are adding to the ongoing trend of action figures for computer games with plans to release three figures depicting characters from Warcraft III. The collectibles are 11.5 - 13.5 cm tall and depict an orcish war chief, dwarven mountain king and night elf arch-druid.

Surround me in Sound

DTS debuts at 2002 Game Developers Conference

Sound is an aspect of your PC that can dramatically enhance your gaming experience. Unlike video that is confined to the boundaries of your monitor, sound output produces a physical component - sound waves. A well-positioned surround system attached to your PC can dramatically bridge the gap between simply playing and being totally immersed. Great news then that DTS (Digital Theatre Systems) is releasing a surround-sound-capable

software developers kit (SDK) that will allow for real-time interactive multi-channel audio on PC. Being only an SDK, we will need to wait for it to be incorporated into the next generation of games to experience it. Once it has an installed base however, we will be privy to the same system of sound used in large cinema complexes such as Hoyts, Palace or Greater Union all out of our PCs and in the comfort of our homes.



NEW AUSSIE CO

Aussie game developers Blue Tongue Software have made the big time winning a contract with Universal Interactive to create games based on the Jurassic Park License. Do us proud guys.

BYTESIZE



PHONE GAMES

With the launch of AT&T's mMode (wireless web access for mobile phones) come the first "online mobile phone games". Digital Bridges Ltd is one such company already offering over 60 mobile phone games including Wireless Pets, Steve Jackson's Sorcery and Star Trek: First Duty.

E.T'S OUT YOUR EARS

From the "we just don't know what to make of it department" Radica games are set to produce a series of accessories for consoles along the Men in Black II product line. The most bizarre item is a set of earphones which when worn looks like aliens are crawling out of the users ears.

GAMING CHANNEL

America has become the next country after Korea to devote an entire cable channel to the glory that is gaming. Called G4, the channel will feature 13 original weekly series which will cater to gaming genres as well as reviews, industry news and game tips. The channel premiered in style by telecasting a match of Pong, Atari's seminal 1972 video game.

WIRELESS CABLE

Experiments are currently being conducted as to the viability of wireless cable services. The service will act much like a satellite receiver with a main antenna beaming the information over the airwaves to smaller a collector antenna in the home. The lack of any road or house cabling could make wireless cable an affordable broadband solution.

The Sims > Myst

From lovable digital pets to rulers of the world

E A (Nasdaq : ERTS) recently announced it has now shipped over 6.3 million copies of The Sims, surpassing sales of Myst, the previous holder of the "best-selling PC game of all time" title. The Sims achieved this admirable milestone just two years after its initial February 2000 release.

Furthermore The Sims creator Will Wright, recipient of the Game Developers' Choice 2001 Lifetime Achievement Award recently received another accolade. In February he was inducted into the Academy of

Interactive Arts and Sciences Hall of Fame. Congratulations Will, from all of us here at PCPP.



Ubi Soft Takes More Than 2

Preliminary victory over Take-Two in court battle

In a battle that lends credibility to Derek Smart's horror stories concerning Take-Two, Ubi Soft has recently achieved a preliminary victory in its ongoing court action against Take-Two Interactive.

The case against Take-Two involved the company once again not paying royalties to its developers. This time Red Storm, an Ubi Soft subsidiary, is seeking 6.3 million pounds. To date, the court has ordered Take-Two to pay Red Storm 3.145 million pounds and have agreed to Red Storm's request to fast track the

remainder of the case. The full trial in the London high court is currently scheduled for mid-July.



AMD Opteron

64-bit computing from AMD

O pteron - it's not a real word but then again neither is Athlon. So why do processor manufacturers make us endure these names? Because you can't copyright a series of numbers such as 386 - a fact AMD capitalised on in the early nineties with the release of its competing 386 chip.

Formerly code-named "SledgeHammer", the AMD Opteron is an 8th generation core and the industry's first x86 64-bit processor. According to AMD an exciting addition to the chip is HyperTransport(tm) technology

which helps to eliminate or reduce system bottlenecks, enable better efficiency and increase throughput to improve system performance.

Utilising 3 HyperTransport interconnects, the Opteron will be able to provide up to 19.2 gigabytes a second aggregate bandwidth for server systems which is approximately six times faster than current technology.

But what's the point of a 64-bit processor without a 64-bit OS to run on it I hear you ask. Fret not for AMD is collaborating with Microsoft to incorporate 64-bit support for the Opteron in

Windows. Linux users will also be able to share in the joys of 64-bit instructions with major Linux developers working to have 64-bit support ready by the Opteron's release. Backward compatibility or as AMD likes to put it, "investment protection", is factored in with the Opteron which can run either 32-bit or 64-bit applications at optimal performance. According to AMD, its 64-bit solution is superior because unlike the proprietary and fractured solutions that dominate the 64-bit computing market, AMD's 64-bit solution is based on the x86 instruction set.

Big Disk!!

Creative releases the Nomad Jukebox 3

Serious MP3/WMA devotees can work themselves into a frenzy over the release of the Creative Nomad Jukebox 3. Featuring 20GB of storage, the Nomad 3 will be able to store 8000 standard songs with a playback quality of 98dB Signal Noise Reduction (SNR).

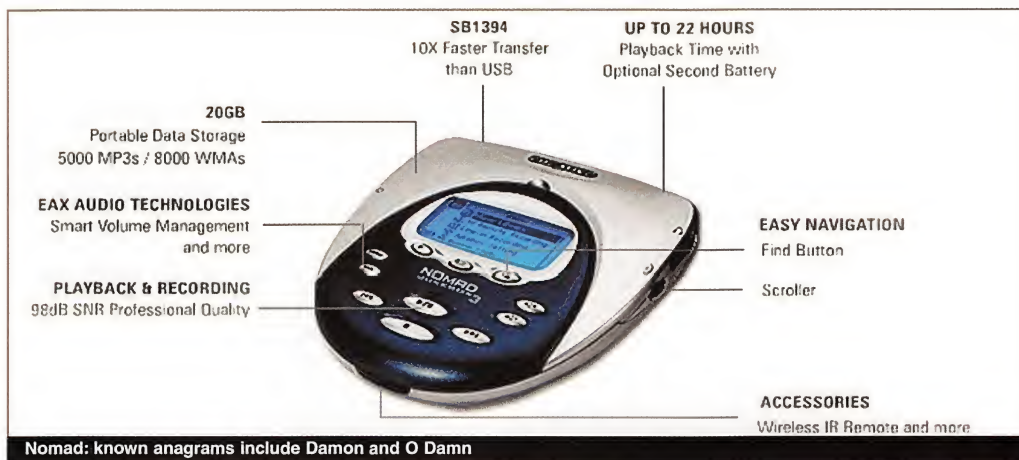
To aid in transferring data across to the Nomad 3 player Creative has incorporated SB1394 functionality. SB1394 is an IEEE-1394a/SBP-2 compliant interface that allows for high speed serial I/O. Devices connected to a PC via SB1394 can transfer audio and video content at up to 400 Megabits per second, 30 times faster than USB 1.1.

Owners of the Sound Blaster Audigy will be able to make immediate use of the super fast transfer speeds from the built-in interface on their soundcard. Those without an Audigy or IEEE-1394a compliant interface will still be able to use the MP3 player through their USB connection.

Prime features of the Nomad 3 include: 2 lithium-ion battery bays allowing for 22 hours of uninterrupted playback; frequency response of 20Hz-20kHz with harmonic distortion output at less than 0.1%; 20GB or 40GB version; optical and analog line-in which can record and encode directly into MP3 or WAV in real time opening up extra functionality as a dictation device. Anti-skip

functionality provides up to 7 minutes of data protection to ensure smooth operation whilst on the move and EAX is also included allowing for smart volume management, environmental effects, time-scaling, multi-channel effects, headphone spatialisation and advanced equalisation.

Optional accessories include an infra red remote control, PC docking station, wired remote, wired remote with FM tuner, built-in mic and LCD, car adaptor kit, protective leather carrying case, interchangeable faceplates, and extra lithium-ion rechargeable batteries. With the starting price at US\$399 it's not cheap but reasonable considering how feature-rich the device is.



BYTESIZE



GAMING KILLS

The US government is currently in talks with both Quantum 3D and Nvidia as to the military usage of their graphics chip technology. There are no details to be found as to what they want the chips for but if the military want them then it can be assumed that it's for no fun-loving purpose.

VIRTUAL BODYSUIT

A group of American researchers are currently working on the design of a magnetically induced virtual-reality bodysuit for use in fighter jets. The suit uses magnets to provide a form of force feedback, moving or manipulating the body. The researchers were quick to point out that both the sex and gaming industry may be interested in the tech.

RED HAT MUPPETS

Jim Henson's Creature Shop is using Red Hat Linux as the control OS of its new range of puppets and digital animations. The malleability of Linux makes it an ideal OS to use in animatronics. Creature Shop will also be branching into digital animation and are currently writing a Linux application to allow the animations to be controlled like puppets.

DREAMCAST SALES

In its first week of sales in Japan, the Xbox was outsold by the now defunct Sega Dreamcast by nearly 1/3. That's right, the Dreamcast, an unsupported, outdated console sold 3427 units as opposed to the new, next generation Xbox, which only sold 2179. Long live the Dreamcast.

Blackley Quits

Xbox, ex-developer

Love it or hate it, the Xbox is here and its fans have the perseverance and enthusiastic dedication of one Mr Seamus Blackley to thank. Disheartened and disillusioned with the failure of his 1998 release, Tresspasser: The Lost World, Seamus sought refuge in the halls of Microsoft.

After Microsoft employed him to work on "graphics technology" on February 5, 1999 it was Sony's boasting that the PS2 could eclipse the PC as the most useful digital appliance in the home that caused Microsoft to mobilise.

Blackley's response to Sony is what we call the Xbox today. In the development stages it was he who argued that the game machine with the best technology from PCs

would lead to the creation of new kinds of artistic expression. While Nintendo saw games as toys and Sony viewed them as entertainment, Blackley taught Microsoft to regard them as art.

Blackley's resignation comes at a difficult time for Microsoft with the Xbox having its price slashed in Australia and Europe to boost sales. Blackley is also the last remaining member of the original Xbox development team to turn off the metaphorical lights.

"It just happened to coincide with the other stuff ... it has nothing to do with Xbox," he explained. "It's been extremely frustrating for me to not be making games."

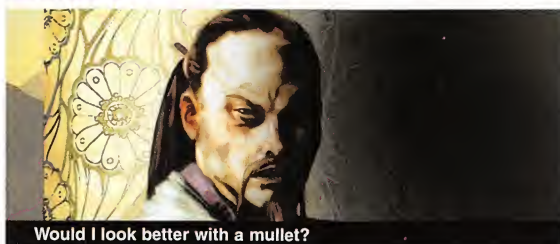
He has not announced his next project.



Australia's Most Wanted

Send your entries to
amw@pcpowerplay.com.au

Once again the humble RPG has made a strong showing in the AMW charts but all that aside, one thing was made very clear - you guys really want your Warcraft 3 fix and you want it now. From the hundreds of emails and letters we received telling us which games you are currently drooling about, over 90% of people put Warcraft 3 as their number one choice. Forget the War on Terrorism. If Warcraft 3: Reign of Chaos isn't all it's cracked up to be, instead of Al Qaeda terrorists, it will be disgruntled fans of the series starting WWII. Blizzard, you have been warned.



AUSTRALIA'S MOST WANTED	
1	Warcraft 3: Reign of Chaos
2	Neverwinter Nights
3	Unreal Tournament 2
4	Doom 3
5	Grand Theft Auto 3
6	Icewind Dale 2
7	Unreal 2
8	Deus Ex 2
9	Morrowind
10	Masters of Orion 3

Belkin's Infinite Monkeys Competition

Answer our question and we'll load you up with stuff

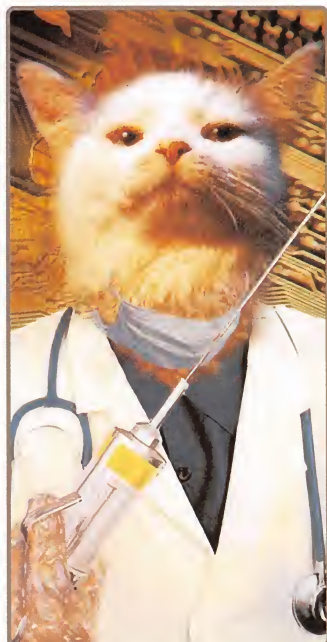
The good folk over at Belkin have put together a fine prize pack for your gaming pleasure comprising an N45 Gamepad (reviewed this issue), Nostromo Speed Pad, N30 Gaming Mouse and swanky keyboard. All you have to do to win this great little package is answer this simple question:

If infinite monkeys sat down in front of infinite keyboards, what would be the first line of English text that is produced?

The best and most amusing answer wins the pack. It's as simple as that. Get typing and send all your entries to:

Infinite Monkeys Comp

C/O: PC PowerPlay
78 Renwick St
Redfern 2016



dr claw

champions of the 133+! this is the story of my new computer which i finally convinced my dad to buy me because my old computer was accidentally destroyed when the fbi raided our house looking for the secret codes. a guy i knew on the irc sent me an email for safekeeping because he said he had to reformat his harddrive by blowing up the enclave or something, anyway i got the email and the next thing i knew there was a helicopter at the front door and my dad was screaming something about it being the last straw but he says that so much it

is like the cry of some kind of rare bird or something. anyway the fbi charged into the house and they shot up my pc with guns and then used an emp bomb which ruined my dad's brand new 80cm sony trinitron tv and his new digital set top box and also the electrics in his nissan skyline gtr which he bought with his redundancy pay. so anyway i said to dad that he needed to buy me a new pc and he said sure what the hell and something about not having anything left to lose. so we went to a computer fair in Parramatta in the old town hall

and it was dark and smelly and guys who couldn't speak english kept looming out of the shadows and screaming at me and waving sticks of edo ram which i sure as hell didn't want. we found a guy who could speak english and he was bald and like a pirate because he had a parrot on one shoulder but it was one of those parrots that has that disease that makes all their feathers fall out and i think the man had the disease too. anyway he sold me a real deal he sold me an all-in-one motherboard and a Celeron 366 and 64Mb of ram and a savage 3D videocard and a 4x cd rom and it was all for \$2000 which i think is a pretty good deal. my dad was dubious and there was a scene which i will tell you all about next month. l8r!

inform**The Official Australian Games Chart**

Compiled by Inform in association with AVSDA

W/E 28 April 2002

TOP 20**Best Selling Full Price PC Games** (over \$30)

1	▲	The Sims Vacation	Strategy
2	✱	Heroes Of M&M IV	RPG
3	◆	Star Wars Jedi Knight 2	Adventure
4	▼	Dungeon Siege 1.0	RPG
5	▼	The Sims	Strategy
6	▼	The Sims Hot Date	Strategy
7	▼	Medal Of Honor Allied Assault	Action
8	▼	The Sims Collectors Edition	Strategy
9	▼	Harry Potter & Philosopher	Adventure
10	✱	Might & Magic IX	RPG
11	▼	The Sims Livin' Large	Strategy
12	✱	FIFA 2002	Sports
13	▲	Civilization 3	Strategy
14	▼	Sim City 3000 Unlimited	Strategy
15	▼	Empire Earth	Strategy
16	▼	Diablo II: Lord Of Destruction	RPG
17	▼	C & C Renegade	Action
18	▼	C & C Red Alert 2	Strategy
19	◆	Diablo II	RPG
20	◆	The Sims House Party	Strategy

✱ New Entry ◆ Non Mover ▲ Up from last week ▼ Down from last week

Charts can be viewed at
www.informbd.com.au as part of 
For further information phone 02 9264 0095 © 2001 by Inform. All rights reserved**COMING SOON****May 2002**

Age of Wonders 2 (Take 2) - aow2.godgames.com
 Cricket 2002 (EA) - www.easportscricket.com
 F1 2002 (EA) - www.f1gamers.com
 Galactic Battlegrounds Campaign Data (EA) - www.lucasarts.com/products/battlegrounds
 Grand Prix 4 (GameNation) - www.gp4.com
 Grandia II (Ubi Soft) - grandia2.ubi.com
 Masters Series 151 (GameNation) - www.egames.com/FamilyFriendly
 Mythical Warriors: Battle for Eastland (GameNation) - www.outerbound.com/MythicalWarrior/warrior.htm
 NGT (Take 2) - www.NGT.com
 Project IGI 2 (GameNation) - www.codemaster.com/igi2
 Racing Simulation 3 (Ubi Soft) - www.alphaf1.com/f1rs3
 RC Daredevil (GameNation) - www.arushgames.com/games/rcdaredevil/
 Serious Sam Gold Pack (Take 2) - www.croteam.com
 Sims: Vacation (EA) - thesims.ea.com
 Soldier of Fortune 2 (Activision) - www.ravensoft.com/soldier2
 Spider Man: The Movie (Activision) - www.activision.com/games/spiderman/products/movie
 Sven Goran Eriksson's World Cup Challenge (Ubi Soft) - www.soccerageasia.com
 Tom & Jerry Fists of Fury (Ubi Soft) - www.mattel.com
 Tony Hawk Pro Skater 3 (Activision) - www.planettonyhawk.com
 Zanzarah (THQ) - www.zanzarah.com

June 2002

1500 AD: New World (EA) - www.scholast.org/history/timetables/1500s.html
 4x4 Evolution 2 (Take 2) - www.4x4evolution.com
 Battlefield 1942 (EA) - www.battlefield1942.de
 Conflict Desert Storm (GameNation) - www.sci.co.uk/games/conflict/desert_storm/
 Delta Force 4: Task Force Dagger (EA) - www.novalogic.com
 Hidden and Dangerous 2 (Take 2) - www.handd2.godgames.com
 Neverwinter Nights (GameNation) - www.neverwinternights.com
 Operation Flashpoint: Resistance (GameNation) - www.bistudio.com/resistance
 Tropico Gold Pack (Take 2) - tropico.godgames.com
 V8 Supercars Race Driver (GameNation) - www.v8supercar.com.au

July 2002

Duke Nukem Forever (Take 2) - www.3drealms.com/duke4
 Duke Nukem: Hunting (Take 2) - www.3drealms.com/press/dnesfeatures.html
 Fila Tennis (THQ) - www.gamesdomain.com/news/7338.html
 Forteresse (Take 2) - www.forteresse.suspendue.com
 Railroad Tycoon III (Take 2) - www.gamefaqs.com/computer/doswin/data/13612.html

Have Fun Storming the Castle!

To celebrate the recent release of Dungeon Siege we have the dungeon-storming competition to end all dungeon-storming competitions. We have five prize packs to give away, each made up of: A copy of Dungeon Siege, a Dungeon Siege T-shirt and a bow signed by Chris Taylor himself. If that doesn't excite you then you're already dead. All you have to do to win this grab bag of fantasy-related goodness is tell us your best fantasy tough guy (or girl) one-liner - the best threat, insult

or pithy comeback you can think of with a fantasy related theme. Kick your brain into gear, grab your trusty sword and send all entries to:

Have Fun Storming the Castle!

C/O: PC PowerPlay
 78 Renwick St
 Redfern 2016

DVD

Lurking in the wings with George Soropos

Training Day

■ **Distributor:** Village Roadshow ■ **AV:** Dolby 5.1 ■ **Rating:** MA15+ ■ **Runtime:** 118 minutes

8/10
FEATUREEXTRAS
9/10

You may or may not remember the exquisite look of shock on our Russel's face when he was pipped at the post for the 2001 best actor award at the Oscars. Denzel Washington was the fiend responsible and Training Day the vehicle that carried him. Washington plays opposite Ethan Hawke, or rather Jake Hoyte, a cop recently transferred to the narcotics division chasing some action and hands-on policing. Hawke's character wants to make a difference on the mean streets of LA but Washington's character, Alonzo Harris, has other plans.

Ethan Hawke provides a link for the average non-gangbanging person to cling to while traveling through the underworld of LA. He balances the ideas of being the submissive rookie know-nothing and the strong moral focus very well and helps Denzel Washington to play his role in a way that can not be acknowledged by any

award.

Training Day's plot moves along with pace and finesse, with no room for dull moments or confusion. However the backdrop for the story, East LA and the characters within it, seem more like extras from an R&B or gangsta rap video than real life. The gangbangers and street people in Training Day are a bit too one-dimensional and predictable to be truly menacing.

However that isn't to deny the story's power as the timing of events and sharp dialogue keep your eyes and ears glued to the film's every twist and turn. The main supporting characters are also well crafted and help to convince the viewer that they are a part of this world of double dealing, mistrust and powerplays (Whassat? - Ed).

Training Day is one of the best action thrillers of recent years and this DVD's 'making of' doco, deleted scenes and, best of all, an alternate ending, make this a good choice for the collector.



Drop it Action Man!



Gasaraki

■ **Distributor:** Madman ■ **AV:** Dolby Digital 2.0 ■ **Rating:** PG ■ **Runtime:** 75 min

8/10
FEATUREEXTRAS
6/10

If you like long, immersive and just plain good Anime then you cannot go past this new series from Ryusuke Takahashi. Gasaraki 3 continues the story of the No-dancing Yushiro and the Tactical Armour team he has befriended and includes some excellent action sequences and a few surprising revelations about the origins of the TAs.

Gasaraki stands out from other mech anime because of the gritty realism of the mechs themselves. They get clogged up by sand, blinded by flares and act like a bunch of prototypes should: unreliably! The story is also nicely balanced between action and revelation and has so far been intriguing and much more focused than most other multi-part anime such as Neon Genesis. Dubbing is also above average.

Remembrance of the Daleks

■ **Distributor:** Village Roadshow ■ **AV:** Dolby Digital ■ **Rating:** G ■ **Runtime:** 97 min

6/10
FEATUREEXTRAS
7/10

Remembrance of the Daleks was the first story aired in the 25th season of the show and the first full story with Ace as the Doctor's companion. Remembrance also boasts the spiffiest Daleks ever seen, with some obvious care, attention and love, put into their construction. Unfortunately Sylvester McCoy is my least favourite Doctor for the reason that the show was being very bluntly targeted at a younger audience by this stage and suffered from it at every level of production. The acting is hammy to the extreme, the dialogue silly and the situations even sillier (Ace taking on a Dalek with a high tech baseball bat for example). The good Doctor only survived one more season after this one and it isn't hard to see why.

Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

■ Distributor: Village Roadshow ■ AV: Dolby Digital ■ Rating: G ■ Runtime: 199 minutes



This story begins with the most remarkable book ever to come out of the great publishing houses of Ursa Minor. More popular than The Celestial Home Care Omnibus, better selling than Fifty-Three More Things to do in Zero Gravity... well you know the rest.

Many of you can probably recite most of the best bits from Hitchhikers' in your sleep and indeed many aspects of the book trilogy (now with five installments and counting) have become a part of modern Western culture. Who doesn't know the answer to Life, the Universe and Everything? Yes that's right, forty-two. Now what's the question? Something to do with mice? Close enough.

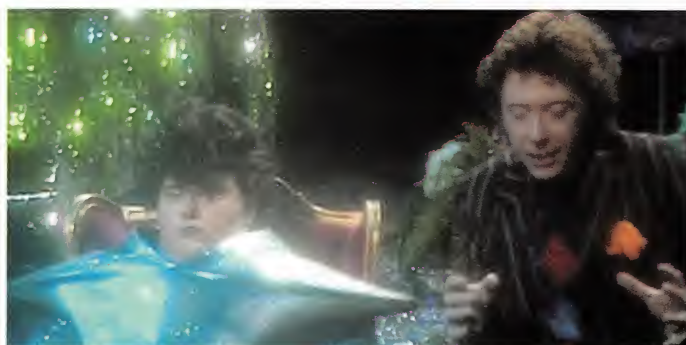
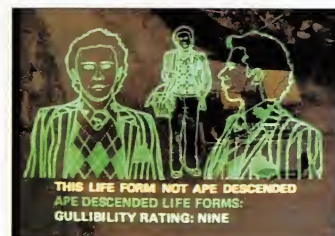
The really exciting thing about this set is that previously you've probably had to rent Hitchhikers on video. Most likely one that's been churned through a million VCRs since the late 80s. You've probably forgotten what the show

originally looked like without the fuzzy bits where some twit had left the tape on top of their speakers.

HGTTG on DVD is therefore a revelation, or should be, to long-time fans and the best way for new potential fans to get into it. All episodes have been remastered for both visual and audio quality, making the DVD as good as the original broadcast. Of course TV production has limitations which the DVD format exposes remorselessly. No TV production, no matter how well remastered, can look as good as a film simply because films are made for a huge screen that shows off every flaw immediately, while TV's small screen does the opposite and hides paint streaks and dodgy wiring quite well.

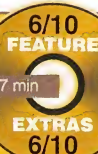
Extras include a 'making of' doco, an intro by the book's voice Peter Jones plus material on the radio show, animatronics (Zaphod's extra head) deleted scenes, out-takes and more.

Don't look at me like I've got two heads



Let's Get Skase

■ Distributor: Village Roadshow ■ AV: Dolby 5.1 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Runtime: 97 min



The idea for this film probably

burbled away in the minds of every Australian for the year or so the Skase fiasco dominated the media. But these guys actually went and made it. Essentially an action/comedy film Get Skase puts an unlikely team of people together united by a common hatred of our good friend Christopher Skase and with nothing but revenge in mind.

The humour is sadly very hit and miss with little being done to offset the massive clichés that arise in team flicks like this. All team-based action flicks are basically 'The Dirty Dozen' remade with a few fiddles here and there to hide the truth and Get Skase is a little too predictable to carry it off. Worst of all, the Chase for Skase eventually becomes the chase for Skase's computer disk and descends into poor farce.



Star Trek: TNG Season One

■ Distributor: Paramount ■ AV: Dolby Digital ■ Rating: PG ■ Runtime: Forever? Nearly



This is a whopper of a collection.

Seven DVDs comprising the entire first season of Star Trek The Next Generation (ST:NG) This boxed set forms the first part of what will eventually be the complete seven-year series, with a season to be released every two months by Paramount. ST:NG introduced us to the concept of on-board counselors (What would Kirk have done with Deanna Troy? hubba hubba), Robots who wanted to be human and the dreaded Holodeck, the lamest plot-device of all time.

The episodes have been remastered to clean them up a bit, but haven't had a George Lucas done on them and all the special effects and dodgy bits remain intact. Like the Hitchhikers set, the real value for fans is the new, clean print of the episodes available on the DVD, and the four little doco's that constitute the extras.

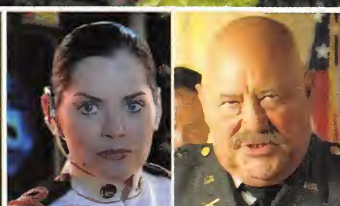


SCORE LIST

Gold Award
90+

This month in the score list we salute our simian ancestors with an all singing all dancing tribute to monkeys in games, or, more precisely, gaming in general. We here at PCPP loves us some monkeys, and after reading this we hope you will too.

GAME NAME SCORE # ISSUE



12 o'Clock High	#46	68%
1nsane	#56	87%
Abomination:Nemesis	#44	81%
Age of Empires 2	#54	90%
Age of Sail 2	#60	70%
Age of Wonders	#46	84%
Airfix: Dogfighter	#61	79%
Airport Inc.	#48	42%
Akuma: Demonspawn	#47	50%
Alice	#58	83%
Alien Nations	#52	75%
All Star Tennis 2000	#54	62%
Allegiance	#50	81%
Alone in the Dark 4	#63	69%
Anachronox	#65	85%
Anarchy Online	#68	86%

ARCANUM

During one of the sub-quests you can find a monkey trainer who will sick his pack of trained monkeys on you. They're not a hard fight but amusing none the less. I guess the characters have monkey brains for dinner that night.

92% in PCPP #64

Arcatera	#54	49%
Army Men: Air Tactics	#50	65%
Army Men: In Space	#48	66%
Asheron's Call	#50	88%
Atlantis II	#50	78%
B-17 2: Mighty Eighth	#57	90%
Baldur's Gate II	#53	93%
Baldur's Gate II	#65	89%
Bass Avenger	#57	8%
Battle for Naboo	#60	25%
Battle Isle: Andosia War	#58	76%
Battle of Britain	#59	90%
Battlecruiser 3000	#50	72%
Battlezone 2:	#48	85%
Beetle Crazy Cup	#49	74%
Blair Witch:Coffin Rock	#59	62%
Blair Witch: Elly K	#59	74%
Blair Witch: Rustin Parr	#59	85%
Buck & Bass 2	#56	11%
Call to Power II	#58	78%
Carmageddon 2000	#56	40%

BLACK & WHITE

Any game in which you can train a giant orangutan to eat virgins and throw its own excrement at sheep is OK in our book. If you get tired of teaching your creature stupid tricks you can always beat it until it turns evil. Fun for the whole family.

92% in PCPP #60

Championship Mgr	#57	90%
Chicken Run	#59	69%
Civilization III	#68	95%
Clive Barker's Undying	#60	83%
Close Combat: Invasion	#58	85%
Codename: Eagle	#46	64%
Colin McRae Rally 2	#57	85%
Combat Flight Sim 2	#57	83%
Combat Mission	#56	90%
Commandos 2	#67	91%
Conflict Zone	#63	84%
Conquest: Frontier War	#66	85%
Cossacks	#62	79%
Cricket 2000	#51	70%
Crime Cities	#61	52%



That's why I shouldn't eat beans.

Crimson Skies	#55	89%
Croc 2	#48	78%
Crusaders of M & M	#50	75%
Cultures	#56	81%
Daikatana	#52	64%
Dark Reign 2	#51	89%
Deep Fighter	#57	60%
Deep Space 9: Fallen	#62	84%

Delta Force 2	#46	78%
Delta Force: L W	#58	75%
Descent 3	#47	65%
Desperados	#62	86%
Deus Ex	#51	98%

ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND

How can a game with the word monkey in the title not be good? A fantastic sense of humour combined with simple, amazingly fun and addictive gameplay makes Escape From Monkey Island one of the greatest games ever. If you've never played it, why not? If you have, play it again.

90% in PCPP #55

Diablo 2	#53	89%
Diablo II: L of D	#63	90%
Dick Johnson V8	#46	45%
Dino Crisis	#53	68%
Dirt Track Racing	#55	90%
DTR: Sprint Cars	#59	87%
Disciples 2	#73	89%
Divided Ground	#67	75%
Dogs of War	#51	81%
Dracula	#47	58%
Dragon Riders of Pern	#67	60%
Dungeon Siege	#74	87%
Earth 2150	#53	91%
Elite Force Expansion	#64	30%
Emperor: Battle Dune	#63	79%
Empire Earth	#68	89%
Enemy Engaged	#50	91%
Eurofighter Typhoon	#65	55%
Everquest Velious	#59	85%
EverQuest Luclin	#73	84%
Evil Islands	#60	79%
Evil Twin	#68	70%
Evolve	#50	71%
F/A 18 Hornet	#47	91%
F/A-18E Super Hornet	#54	63%
F1 Racing Champ	#60	90%
F1 Season 2000	#58	67%
F1 World GP 2000	#62	78%
FA League Mgr 2002	#67	70%
Fallout Tactics	#61	85%
Fate of the Dragon	#61	67%
FIFA 2000	#45	88%

FIFA 2001	#57	84%
FIFA 2002: RTWC	#74	82%
Final Fantasy VIII	#47	77%
Flight HK	#75	86%
Fly! II	#65	71%
Flying Heroes	#51	76%
Ford Racing	#48	72%
Fox Sports NBA 2000	#44	56%
Freedom:1st Resistance	#62	64%
Freedom Force	#74	94%
Freespace 2	#44	95%
Fur Fighters	#58	73%
Gabriel Knight 3	#44	87%
Galaga	#58	64%
Gangsters 2: Vendetta	#64	51%

HEAVY METAL: FAKK 2

No actual monkeys feature in the game but the main character is based on cheesecake model and B-Film actress Julie Strain. Her husband, Kevin Eastman created the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. There were lots of monkeys in TMNT, not including a cameo by Vanilla Ice in Secret of the Ooze.

80% in PCPP #54

Ghost Recon	#74	70%
Giants: Citizen Kabuto	#58	86%
Global Ops	#74	89%
Gorky 17	#47	65%
Grand Prix 3	#53	88%
Grand Prix Legends	#52	95%
Grand Prix World	#49	83%
Grand Theft Auto 2	#44	84%
Grandia II	#74	70%
Ground Control	#52	90%
Gulf War	#45	55%
Gunlok	#63	81%
Gunman Chronicles	#57	80%
Gunship	#50	89%
Half-Life Blue Shift	#64	78%
Half-Life: Counter-Strike	#55	91%
Half-Life: Opp Force	#45	90%
Heist	#62	7%
Heroes Chron Final	#67	65%
Heroes Chronicles	#57	68%
Heroes of M and M 4	#74	92%
H and D Deluxe	#75	65%

H and D: Freedom	#46	45%
Hitman: Codename 47	#56	90%
Homeworld: Cataclysm	#55	90%
Hostile Waters	#61	91%
Icwind Dale	#52	80%
Icwind Dale 2	#61	70%
Il2 Sturmovik Exp	#75	88%
Imperium Galactica 2	#46	92%
In Cold Blood	#56	80%
Independence War	#44	72%
Indiana Jones	#45	69%
Infestation	#56	68%
Int Cricket Captain	#66	71%
Interstate 82	#47	60%
Invictus	#48	51%
I-War 2: Edge of Chaos	#63	85%

EVIL TWIN

Once again no real monkeys featured in the game but was it just us or did the main character bear an uncanny resemblance to Helena Bonham Carter's character in Tim Burton's Planet of the Apes? She's the best big hair actress in the world.

70% in PCPP #68

Jagged Alliance 2	#61	83%
Jane's USAF	#44	86%
Jedi: Outcast	#73	90%
Jetfighter 4	#61	75%
KA-52 Alligator	#48	65%
King of Dragon Pass	#52	31%
Kingdom Under Fire	#60	78%
Kiss Pinball	#58	22%
Kiss Psycho Circus	#54	64%
Klingon Academy	#53	83%
Kohan: Ahirman's Gift	#73	88%
Leadfoot	#64	80%
Legends of Mt & Magic	#65	40%
Lemmings Revolution	#51	70%
Links 2000	#44	79%
Links 2001	#57	82%
Links Championship	#68	84%
The Longest Journey	#68	88%
M25 Racer	#45	25%
Madden 2000	#44	84%
Madden 2001	#56	78%

MIGHT AND MAGIC IX

Like it or hate it the last in the Might and Magic series features monsters that look like a cross between a chimpanzee and the Aphex Twin, not that the Aphex Twin looks at all dissimilar to a chimpanzee to begin with. Great music, very ugly man.

87% in PCPP #74

Madden 2002	#68	78%
Majesty	#49	79%
Martian Gothic	#50	51%
Max Payne	#65	84%
Maximum Flight	#52	78%
MDK 2	#52	84%
Mech Collection	#54	69%
Mech Commander 4	#73	79%
Mechcommander 2	#64	84%
Mechwarrior 4	#57	91%
Mercedes Truck Racing	#57	55%
Merchant Prince 2	#64	42%
Messiah	#48	89%
Metal Fatigue	#53	76%
Metal Gear Solid	#57	78%
Microsoft Flight Sim	#44	84%
Midtown Madness	#54	82%
M and M VIII	#49	55%
Millennium Racer	#50	70%
Mission Humanity	#61	7%
Monopoly Tycoon	#67	75%

The Moon Project	#63	87%
Motocross Madness 2	#51	85%
MotoRacer 3	#73	80%
MTV Skateboarding	#55	65%
Myst III Exile	#62	81%
NASCAR 2002	#74	90%
Nascar 3	#44	89%
NASCAR 4	#60	93%
Nascar Revolution	#48	35%
The Nations	#66	70%
Nations: Fighter Comm	#44	82%
NBA Inside Drive 2000	#46	68%
NBA Live 2000	#45	90%
NBA Live 2001	#60	81%
Need for Speed	#52	75%
Nerf Arena	#46	70%
NHL 2002	#68	82%
NHL Championship	#46	78%
Nicktoons Racing	#61	71%
No One Lives Forever	#56	90%
Nocturne	#46	79%
Nox	#48	83%
Redneck Racing	#64	57%
Omikron	#44	93%
Oni	#58	88%
Operation Flashpoint	#64	94%
Original War	#65	74%
Outlive	#63	56%
Pacman	#57	70%
Pacman All Stars	#75	50%
Pandora's Box	#47	68%
Panzer Elite	#46	85%
Panzer General 3	#58	72%
PGA Golf Titanium	#59	86%
Pharoah	#45	88%
Phoenix	#46	64%
Pizza Syndicate	#54	52%
Planescape: Torment	#46	91%
Pool of Radiance	#66	79%
Pro Rally 2001	#59	68%
Pro Bull Rider 2	#56	36%
Project Eden	#67	80%
Project IGI	#57	86%
Puma Street Soccer	#46	75%
Quake 3: Team Arena	#58	57%
Quake III Arena	#45	93%
Rainbow 6: Covert Ops	#58	69%
Rainbow 6: Rogue Sp	#44	92%
Rally Championship	#45	88%
Rayman 2	#45	89%
Reach for the Stars	#54	79%
Red Alert 2	#56	91%
Red Alert 2	#67	88%
Red Faction	#67	81%
Resident Evil 3	#58	63%
Revenant	#45	82%
Rising Sun	#48	82%
Rollcage II	#50	80%

SCHIZM

All of the actors in this stinker looked somewhat like the missing link giving the game some default monkey status. If you turn off the sound the amount they wave their arms makes it look like a strange mating ritual. The voice acting also sounded like baboons fighting.

55% in PCPP #66

Rollercoaster Tycoon	#45	81%
Rugby 2001	#55	80%
Rune	#56	80%
Sacrifice	#55	90%
Screamer 4x4	#58	59%
Septerra Core	#47	84%
Serious Sam	#60	81%
Settlers IV	#62	65%
Seven Kingdoms 2	#44	82%
Severance B of D	#59	80%
Shadow Company	#44	74%
Shadow Watch	#49	65%
Sheep	#58	70%
Shogun: Warlord Ed	#66	86%

**Barrel of Monkeys**

Shogun: Total War	#50	92%
Alpha Centauri	#45	83%
Sim Coaster	#59	79%
The Sims	#47	90%
The Sims: House Party	#61	80%
The Sims: Livin' Large	#54	88%
The Sims: Vacation	#75	67%
Slave Zero	#47	55%
Soldier of Fortune	#49	86%
Soulbringer	#51	80%
South Park Rally	#47	41%
Space Tripper	#63	86%
Spec Ops 2	#46	60%
Speed Demons	#47	55%

**Now that's just weird**

Spiderman	#68	67%
Star Trek: Elite Force	#55	86%
Star Trek: Armada	#49	56%
Star Trek: Away Team	#61	75%
Star Trek: Bridge Com	#73	79%
Star Trek: Hidden Evil	#46	69%
Star Trek: New Worlds	#56	35%
Star Wars: Force Com	#49	58%
Starfleet Command	#59	55%
Starlancer	#49	93%
Starship Troopers	#56	76%
Startopia	#63	88%

WILD WILD WEST: THE STEEL ASSASSIN

No actual monkeys appeared in the game but anyone who though making a game from a lackluster movie based on a short lived television series is a very silly little monkey indeed. The fact that the game also fails to include the redeeming feature of Salma Hayek's butt makes it even sillier.

61% in PCPP #51

The Sting	#66	73%
Stronghold	#68	93%
Stunt GP	#63	73%
Stupid Invaders	#57	85%
SU-27 Flanker 2.0	#44	83%
Sub Command	#68	65%

Submarine Titans	#56	70%
Sudden Strike Forever	#65	88%
Sudden Strike	#60	92%
Summoner	#61	90%
Superbike 2000	#49	89%
Swat 3	#46	90%
Sydney 2000	#52	85%
Tachyon: The Fringe	#54	84%
Thandor	#54	69%
Theme Park World	#45	80%
Theocracy	#49	76%
Thief Gold	#45	96%
Thief II: The Metal Age	#49	95%
Throne of Darkness	#67	91%
Tiger Woods 2002	#75	90%
Tiger Woods 2000	#49	84%
Tiger Woods USA Tour	#57	59%
Tomb Raider Chron	#56	71%
Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2	#58	92%
Tony Hawk Pro Skater 3	#75	91%
Train Simulator	#63	59%
Traitor's Gate	#44	78%
Tribes 2	#60	93%
Tropico	#64	71%
UEFA Manager 2000	#51	79%
Ultima IX: Ascension	#45	70%
Ultima Online	#48	68%

**It waz vewy vewy quiet...**



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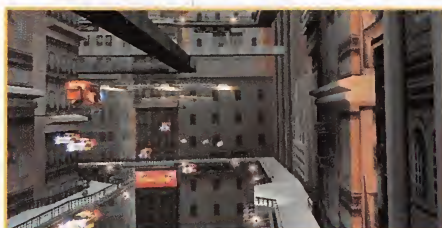
GAMES

They gave us the code, we give you the lowdown

While trawling through the net looking for interesting games to preview this month something became abundantly clear: 2002 looks set to become the year of the RPG. Every week more and more role playing games are announced in one form or another - first person, third person, isometric action, massive multiplayer online games, RTS/RPG and any hybrids of the above you could possibly imagine. You'll hear no complaints from me about the proliferation of the RPG - I love the games. They're just about all I play at home but the sheer number of announcements and releases does raise some interesting questions. Why is the RPG becoming so popular? Is it because of the immersive qualities of a good plot or something deeper? Are people playing RPGs purely for entertainment reasons or are they playing for more escapist purposes? I don't pretend to know the answer. Expect to see a lot of role playing games in these pages in the next year, by what we've seen so far they shouldn't disappoint in the slightest.

Anyway, this month we have endeavored to find something other than RPGs to bring to you and we've put together a really star-studded lineup. For starters we have a look at the new futuristic racing/action game, Beam Breakers. The preview code looks very impressive and we can hardly wait for the final product. We also take some pretty in-depth looks at three games that constantly rear their heads on the AMW charts, Tactical Ops, Soldier of Fortune 2 and Unreal 2. After our article on the Death of Genres we've been waiting for the next great singleplayer FPS and it could very well be one of these. Sit back, take a load off, pop the top off a beer (if you're old enough to drink that is) and savour the delights that will soon be coming to a monitor near you.

Daniel Wilks
News Editor
danielw@next.com.au



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Update



Beam Breakers



Dougie the flying pizza boy



Get your motor running...



...head out on the highway



B lade Runner and to a lesser

extent The Fifth Element have a lot to answer for, not the least being the all too common and understandable desire to cruise around in flying cars. After all, weren't we promised in film and fiction that we would have said flying vehicles by the year 2001? Where are our flying cars? We want flying cars. Fortunately a German design team called Simulis have come to the rescue developing a flying car racing/action game to fill the void until we can have our own airborne automobiles.

Beam Breakers puts you in the driver's seat as a struggling futuristic New York Taxi driver looking for that elusive break into the big time. No more plot detail is known at this time but at some stage in the game the driver will encounter different gangs, become involved with different crime families and invariably end up on the wrong side of the law.

The game will progress through 60 odd missions with goals ranging from pizza delivery to stealing cars, outrunning the police, racing rival gangs or acting as a courier. Plot/mission progression will follow the tried and true formula of starting simple and unlocking more in-depth and complicated tasks later in the game. In this sense Beam Breakers can be compared to games such as Driver or Grand Theft Auto but underneath the simple trappings lies the heart of a very deep racing game. The major advance in the genre is the fact that the cars can fly, meaning in simple terms that all of the cityscapes and race-tracks are three-dimensional. Races can take place over a number of levels with shortcuts available to those with good eyesight and lightning reflexes. The 3D nature of the tracks also means that races and missions will rely equally on spatial perception and use of the terrain as they do on speed and handling.

Instead of trying to accelerate past an opponent you could take the high ground and try to use momentum to get speed, drop down low to see if there's a shortcut through buildings at ground level or even try to ram the opposition into support beams, gas pipes or oncoming traffic. Playing fair is for the weak at heart.

Learning to fly

The control mechanism for Beam Breakers couldn't be simpler, using the arrow keys (or user defined keys) for direction control and a few others for turbo, acceleration, braking, reverse, map views and a use key. From what we've seen so far control is very intuitive and nicely responsive. Unlike the majority of racing games where control is a matter of fine turning and helped by a knowledge of car physics, Simulis has opted for a more arcade-like feel. Lightly tapping the more directional buttons is enough to get a

■ Developer: Simulis ■ Publisher: Fishtank Interactive ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: 2nd Quarter 2002

We want flying cars

As the screen shots can attest, Beam Breakers looks absolutely gorgeous. The maps are alive with movement and everything from the buildings to the floating billboards have a wonderfully solid presence. If this is what the city of the future looks like then we want to live there. As well as the design of the maps being excellent, some real thought has gone into the 30 or so cars that can be driven during the game. Each car has an uncanny resemblance to real world vehicles with a small tweak (such as fins and the lack of wheels) to bring them into the futuristic setting. We've only seen a pizza delivery car and the Lanx V12 so far but other vehicles that can be expected include the Dudge V12, Lincoln M3 and CMG Oldsmobile. If they look anything as good as the cars implemented so far we're in for a real treat.



...lookin' for adventure...



...in whatever flies our way



Born to be wi-i-ild...



response - a skill that will most probably come in very handy in the finished game. The levels we have seen so far are full of other cars, buildings, floating billboards and myriad other hazards to avoid. The physics engine used makes for some amazing and surprising crashes: clip an oncoming car and you might find yourself hopelessly spinning, being flipped or wind up going the wrong way. Collision and damage modeling will also effect the performance of the cars in a fairly major way.

Though it sounds as though Beam Breakers would be an absolute hoot in multiplayer, Simulis is not going to support that option out of the box. Fishtank Interactive has hinted that there may be a multiplayer mode released in a proposed expansion pack due around six months after the release of the game. Until then gamers will have to content themselves with a huge number of crash-bang missions ranging across The City,

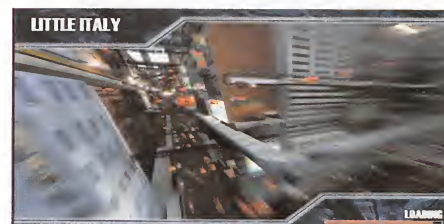
from Little Italy to the East Side and elsewhere. Various powerups lay dotted along the tracks and should add a fair amount to replayability.

Mind the traffic

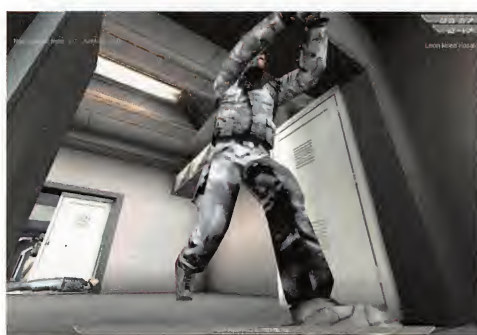
As impressive as the game sound, Beam Breakers is even more impressive on a technical level. The code we have seen shows a very busy world full of colour and movement - each track is teeming with objects and cars, each with its own AI. Simulis boasts that later missions will support up to a staggering 400 cars on the screen at once with little or no performance dip. Traffic reacts in a naturalistic way to stimulus. If you drive the wrong way down a road, cars will flash their lights in warning, honk their horns angrily and swerve out of the way. Sideswipe a car (either deliberately or accidentally) and it might skitter off into another lane of traffic causing chaos. Hilarity often ensues.

Even at this early stage, Beam Breakers shows some truly outstanding lighting effects ranging from headlights to the angle of the sun. Get too close to an oncoming car and their headlights can blind you for a second. Likewise you might round a corner straight into the light of the setting sun, throwing everything into relief and obscuring your view with lens flare. Collisions leave trails of bright sparks and smoke. You should expect to see a lot of that. There's not much work left to be completed on Beam Breakers so we should expect to see it on the shelves fairly soon.

Daniel Wilks



Assault on Terror



Can we get his gun in shot please?



Take that, terror



Big trouble in little China



One of the undeniable attractions of the PC as a gaming platform is the ability to download free mods - the reason that someone somewhere is still playing a copy of Half-Life that was bought last century. As our Mod Life expert Daniel will tell you, the majority of individuals responsible for mods are amateurs, skilled weekenders who will never see a red cent for their hard work. Occasionally though, in the rock star business that games have become, one product will tempt the big companies and maybe transform the lives of a few passionate gamers. Think Counter-Strike and you'll have the reason that Half-Life is still being played today. Now Infogrames has its own version of online combat to tempt those familiar with the Counter-Strike phenomenon.

Dreaming hits...

Tactical Ops was originally known as SWAT, then Tactical Ops, and the retail version is

titled Tactical Ops: Assault on Terror. It started out as a free mod for Unreal Tournament which gathered widespread support among the considerable UT fan-base. Just as Vivendi did before with Counter-Strike, Infogrames has taken the product and repackaged it for the retail market. Owners of UT can still download the original mod gratis but the retail version promises exclusive content.

The stand-alone Tactical Ops will feature exclusive new maps, new skins, a redesigned display, new weapon models as well as new music and voices. Comparisons to Counter-Strike are obvious as the mechanics of both are so alike. Despite this, Infogrames maintains that Tactical Ops is not a knock off but something entirely different. Either way, the market could use some carving up.

The carefully chosen subtitle Assault on Terror personally seeks to emphasise the connection with current events in the modern

world, a link from which other games have shied away. Tactical Ops pits teams of terrorists and special forces agents against each other in hot spots around the world: wintry Northern Ireland, the dusty Middle East, a Mexican mining town and Red China among others. Mission objectives range from protecting or rescuing hostages, to setting or defusing bombs, to simple survival. Leading AI hostages around begging for their lives, and the high body counts and blood leaves no room to imagine this is a sport. Tactical Ops is looking for a gritty semi-realism demonstrated by the ponderous, almost sad soundtrack running through the game. The retail and download versions will also be compatible for online play.

They renamed my gun

The arsenal in Tactical Ops is modelled after real world equivalents. Among the 20 weapons that can be used in the game are

Developer: Kamehan Studios ■ Publisher: MicroProse ■ Distributor: Gamenation ■ Available: May

Somebody Kill Counter-Strike

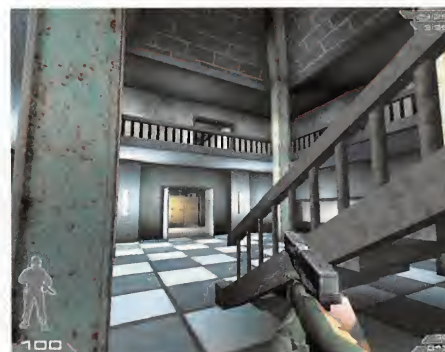
From such an unlikely beginning, Counter-Strike managed to swallow a good portion of the online gaming community. There's more than a little truth to the claim that Counter-Strike is the reason we haven't yet seen a sequel to Half-Life, some two and a half years after its release. Other games that have now joined the team-based online mainstay are Return to Castle Wolfenstein, Medal of Honor: Allied Assault and Day of Defeat. So why hasn't Counter-Strike died the honourable death? Why has Valve been able to keep supporting a game which is now up to version 1.1.0.9?

The fact is that the contenders are yet to offer something substantially better than even an elderly Counter-Strike.

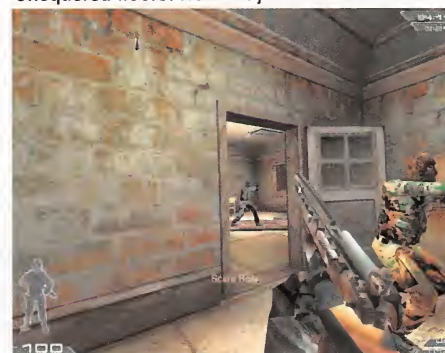
A recent title to challenge the CS Goliath was Global Ops, a game that looks to do well but was not an obvious replacement. Patches already breaking compatibility with the out-of-the-box version, no automatic patching feature as well as the community starting from scratch, means that Global Ops - and indeed any new game - has a tough road ahead. Could it be that only Counter-Strike can match itself? The single player Condition Zero from Gearbox is just around the corner.



A face not even a mother could love



Chequered floors! Now I'm just confused...



Who let the dogs out? Etc...



the M4, Beretta, MP5, the Parker-Hale M85 and the AK47. The weapons are fast, with some emptying their clips at a dizzying rate. The reward for killing enemies, completing goals and finding evidence (bags of drugs, no less) is the accumulation of money. At the start of a new round, the booty can be spent on outfitting your Terrorist or Special Forces gunman with protective gear such as helmets and vests, more firepower in the form of guns, ammo and grenades, and tactical options such as smoke grenades and night vision goggles, very useful in a number of maps where light levels are quite low.

Each game is arranged into rounds of four minutes length, where each player has one life. Should they die they go into spectator mode - players do not respawn. Rounds end when one of the objectives is completed.

Bust out the UT

Kamehan has tried earnestly to separate

Tactical Ops from the similar Counter-Strike. Whatever the marketing guys are saying, Tactical Ops looks to outdo CS and has a number of distinguishing features to its advantage. The UT bot AI is of sufficiently high standard that a singleplayer game is not out of the question, either through progressive missions against a handful of enemies or in a practice mode with dozens of terrorists and special forces troops milling about. Bots are brutal, especially when well armed and prefer a run-and-gun approach in stand-offs. As in UT, bots like hostages and other soldiers can be given orders to which they'll respond, like "follow me" and "stop".

The Unreal Engine proves to be a graphical treat and Tactical Ops looks better than the ageing Half-Life - a testament to the strength of UT. Facial details are realistic - the eyes behind balaclavas and fearful hostages creating considerable gravity. Map textures are of a high standard, lending some much

needed variety. Footprints are left in the snow and blood trails mark the terrain on the maps, as the battle wages.

How fast?

Tactical Ops is furiously quick. The crux of the whole UT rules/Quake sux argument is that UT is so damn fast. Coordinated attacks can be blitzkriegs. This, the game's strongest feature, can be its downfall as rounds occasionally see a large number of participants dead within seconds, leaving most to sit around waiting for the next round.

From the alpha code we've seen, Tactical Ops seems to be a polished alternative to Counter-Strike that brings the strengths of the Unreal Tournament engine to team-based online combat. Whether that's enough to topple or challenge the entrenched Half-Life equivalent in installed user-base is a different matter entirely.

John Dewhurst

SOF 2: Double Helix



Say your prayers, dirtbag



Highway robbery



Midnight snacks - army style



Soldier of Fortune 2 (SOF2) closely follows the footsteps of its infamously gruesome precursor. Once again the player is cast as the rugged, brutal killing-machine John Mullins, a man on a mission to save the world. Of course, the only obvious way to achieve this honourable goal is to trek around the globe, land in various hotspots and slaughter everybody and everything that moves. And that is the exact activity in which our handlebar-moustached hero excels.

Activision plugs SOF2 with the amusingly contradictory line: "now with even more over-the-top realism". This game is anything but realistic, so one can only assume that what this euphemism really means is, "with even more stomach churning gore" - something that the original already featured in surplus. Although the Activision website persists with labels such as "ultra-realistic" and "the most realistic covert-operative FPS ever", these claims are blatantly untrue and anyone who has played

Ghost Recon or SWAT 3 will no-doubt agree. It's akin to claiming that Schwarzenegger's Commando is a hard-hitting, fly-on-the-wall military documentary. But when it comes to games like this (and movies like Commando), who cares about realism? We want bullets flying everywhere, abundant weaponry, a hero who's outnumbered 1000 to one, and a generous helping of gory, mindless violence.

Guns don't kill people...

The final version of SOF2 will flourish with features, new and old. There will be fourteen real-life weapons and ten different types of grenades. Most weapons have two different attack modes, depending on whether you use the right mouse button or the left. For the rifles, the primary attack is the standard pulling of the trigger but the alternate attack is the less effective, but nonetheless brutal option of slamming the rifle-butt into your unfortunate victim. The guns that feature multiple firing

modes in real life also do so in the game. These usually consist, in descending order of accuracy: single-fire, burst, and the showy but hugely inaccurate automatic mode. SOF2 will also include per-pixel damage location and thirty-six damage zones per character model, so when you shoot someone it will be as horrific and gruesome as possible. The fan-site, www.soldier-of-fortune.com also makes the unconfirmed claims of being able to use land and air vehicles and bolt-on objects, perhaps flamethrowers. The same website claims that the enemies will now "be interested in Self-Preservation". Because after all, there's nothing funnier than a terrorist begging for his life.

The use of stealth will also have added importance. The enemy AI will reportedly now act more realistically. They'll react logically to sounds the player makes and changes in their surroundings, as well as various other actions the player or their terrorist buddies performs. Terrorists can manipulate their environment

Developer: Raven ■ Publisher: Activision ■ Distributor: Activision ■ Available: July

Guns, guns and more guns

The weapons in SOF2 are classified as Primary, Secondary, Pistols and Grenades. The final version will feature a total of fourteen weapons and ten grenades. Below is a brief run down of some of the confirmed weapons for the final version:

AK47. Most FPS fans will be familiar with this Soviet assault rifle.

US SOCOM. A powerful and accurate pistol. MicroUzi. Makes up for in firing rate what it lacks in accuracy.

M3a1. A cheaper version of the Thompson sub-machinegun.

M590. A pump action combat shotgun.

M1911A1. Standard pistol for officers serving in WW1, WW2 and Korea.

M4A1. Lightweight US assault rifle. Can be fitted with a grenade launcher.

USAS12. An automatic, powerful, close-range shotgun.

MSG90A1. A highly accurate German-made sniper rifle.

OICW. A high-tech prototype of a futuristic US assault rifle.

M60. This big bad machine gun propels very big bullets at very high velocity.

MM-1 Grenade Launcher. A hand-held, 12-shot cylinder grenade launcher.

RPG7. A shoulder-fired anti-armour rocket-launcher.

RPD-46. This light machinegun is smaller and more manoeuvrable than the M60.



The harsh realities of war



Clearly a Salvador Dali tribute



Corridors of death



(opening doors or setting off alarms) just like the player. They've also learnt teamwork, no longer functioning as suicidal loners.

...people kill people (with guns)

SOF2 utilizes the Quake III: Team Arena game engine enhanced with GHOU2 Rendering technology. What that means is that the SOF2 world will be a lot more visually accurate. The game will feature motion-captured movements, spectacular highlighting and motion blurring, combining to create a more engrossing environment. As well as the character damage model, bullets leave impact marks in other surroundings. Dirt and sand is blasted into the air when shot, wood splinters and glass shatters. Combined with tracer bullet effects, these graphical tweaks give SOF2 a really in-your-face feel. One noticable oversight is that it isn't possible to shoot through things, as it is in many other modern shooters (SWAT 3, for one). It's not possible, for example, to blindly shoot

the beezegus out of a flimsy wall or door, just on the hunch that someone may be hiding behind it. Let's hope this changes for the final release.

The game will feature impressive sound effects that are already notable in the Multiplayer Beta Test. Each weapon has its own distinct sound and the blasts are terrific. The final release will also feature dynamically generated background music. This means that the music will change to suit the player's present situation and location. The various pre-cut scenes will also feature professional voice dubbing. Ravensoft has ensured that SOF2 will shine in this crucial area.

Slaughter your friends!

Several multiplayer options will be supported, showcased by the Multiplayer Beta Test. The standard Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch modes will make a showing, as well as Elimination and Infiltration. Elimination mode is a standard last-man-standing fragathon,

but the real multiplayer strength of SOF2 appears to be the Infiltration mode, where two teams are pitted against each other with unique mission objectives. The Beta Test features one level where the terrorist team must steal an important briefcase and escape via helicopter. The other team must prevent escape by eliminating all the terrorists. The seemingly obvious method, shooting the escape chopper, won't suffice.

Soldier of Fortune 2: Double Helix presents gamers with yet another first person shooter to choose from. Ravensoft relied on graphic gore to sell the first one, so it seems obvious the second will follow suit. That's not to say an alleviation of bloodlust for trigger-happy teenagers is the only thing SOF2 offers (Ouch - Ed). The final release promises an intense plot and fantastic singleplayer fun, while the multiplayer aspects already look good and are shaping up to be top-notch.

Victor Webster

Unreal Tournament 2003

Developer: Epic/Digital Extremes ■ Publisher: Infogrames ■ Distributor: GameNation ■ Available: July



Frag-edelic baby yeah!



He's be-hiiind you



Doesn't anyone know how to take cover?

We announced *Unreal Tournament 2* back in PCPP#71 and the game has continued on its furious development path for a July 2002 release. Somewhat confusingly, the game has been renamed *Unreal Tournament 2003* and PCPP visited Epic in order to get the lowdown on the development process. Lead developer Mark Rein was happy to oblige.

"We want to make *Unreal Tournament 2003* a better multiplayer game and make it more skills-based. To do this we had to make the weapons better balanced and reward players with greater skill, but take away some of the opportunities lesser players had when it came to taking enemies out with cheap shots. Our aim with the game is to turn it into more of a specialised instant action sport style title."

In this vein the assault mode has been dropped in favour of a new basketball style mode called *Bomber* where players have to fight each other while trying to stop the other team from putting a ball through a goal. The player carrying the ball is defenceless, so teamwork will be essential in getting a score. This mode looked mighty interesting, even though we have seen similar things with numerous *Unreal* and (dare we say it) *Quake* mods from unofficial sources.

However the aim with *Unreal 2003* is to make *Bomber* more complete than any mod, with the team mates at your disposal having different abilities in areas such as accuracy, attitude and agility. You will also be able to select the sort of role your team-mates should play when using computer-controlled buddies.

There will be two defensive positions, two offensive positions and a roaming character (best controlled by you). Team-mates will also develop better skills as you continue to have them on your team and there will even be a salary cap when you're looking to recruit.

Original death!

As well as this there will be a host of deathmatch levels and a new version of the *Domination* CTF style mode called *Double Domination* which sees you trying to control two power base areas simultaneously. The much-touted new physics engine also looks like delivering some solid new properties.

Mark Rein adds, "No two deaths will ever look the same with the *Karma* physics engine - we will map the trajectory of bodies as they are hurled through the air. Things will bounce off each other, they will fall down stairs, they will even hang realistically off ledges, which is really cool."

Many of the old weapons such as the assault rifle, which is again the default, will return, but most of these have been tweaked in some way. Mark was also pretty excited about some of the new toys on offer.

"We now have the shield gun, a great defensive weapon. It is a replacement for the impact hammer and when charged you can use it to rush enemies and kill them with the shield's energy. With this weapon we are definitely adding team elements to the game, especially for the new *Bomber* sports game, where someone can have the ball and be protected by players using the shield."

Some of the old weapons have also been tweaked to make them more camper-proof.

As Mark says, "The new sniper rifle is different in that you can see where someone is shooting from. We have done this to make it harder for campers and again make the game better suited to skilled players. We have tried to eliminate the camper who just sits there and hides."

Don't cross the beams!

There are also other cool new weapons such as the link beam gun, which you can power up by firing at a team mate who then uses your energy to power up his link gun for much more damage, *Ghostbusters* style!

The levels we played were hugely detailed with lots of pickups and the game ran smoothly at a pretty decent framerate, even at this un-tweaked stage.

The *Unreal Editor* has also received a considerable amount of attention.

"We have added this whole concept of static meshes, which are structures you can just plop down in a game. You can build them too, but you don't have to build them every time, they can be saved in the editor so you have all sorts of building blocks ready to go. Things like flattening and smoothing terrain is very easy too and the game uses vertex editing for smooth rolling hills. You can also use the in-game cinematic system, called *Matinee*, to animate your own segues."

Unreal Tournament 2003 looks the goods, the visuals are very detailed, the levels make sense architecturally and the weapons are set to deliver variety and some really bloody frags with limbs flying everywhere. Now all we have to do is wait for release. Expect *Unreal Tournament 2003* before the end of the year.

Steve Polak



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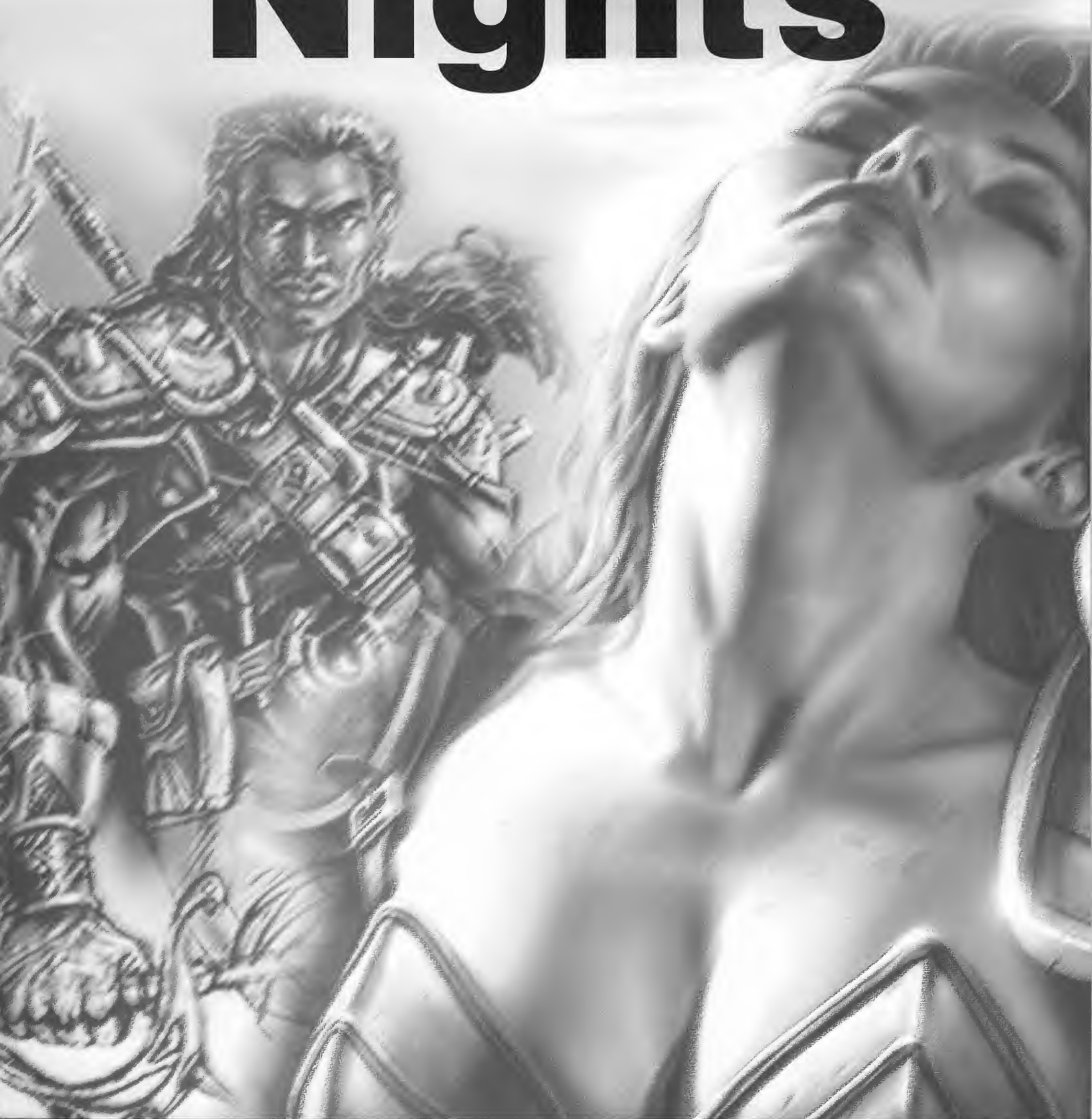
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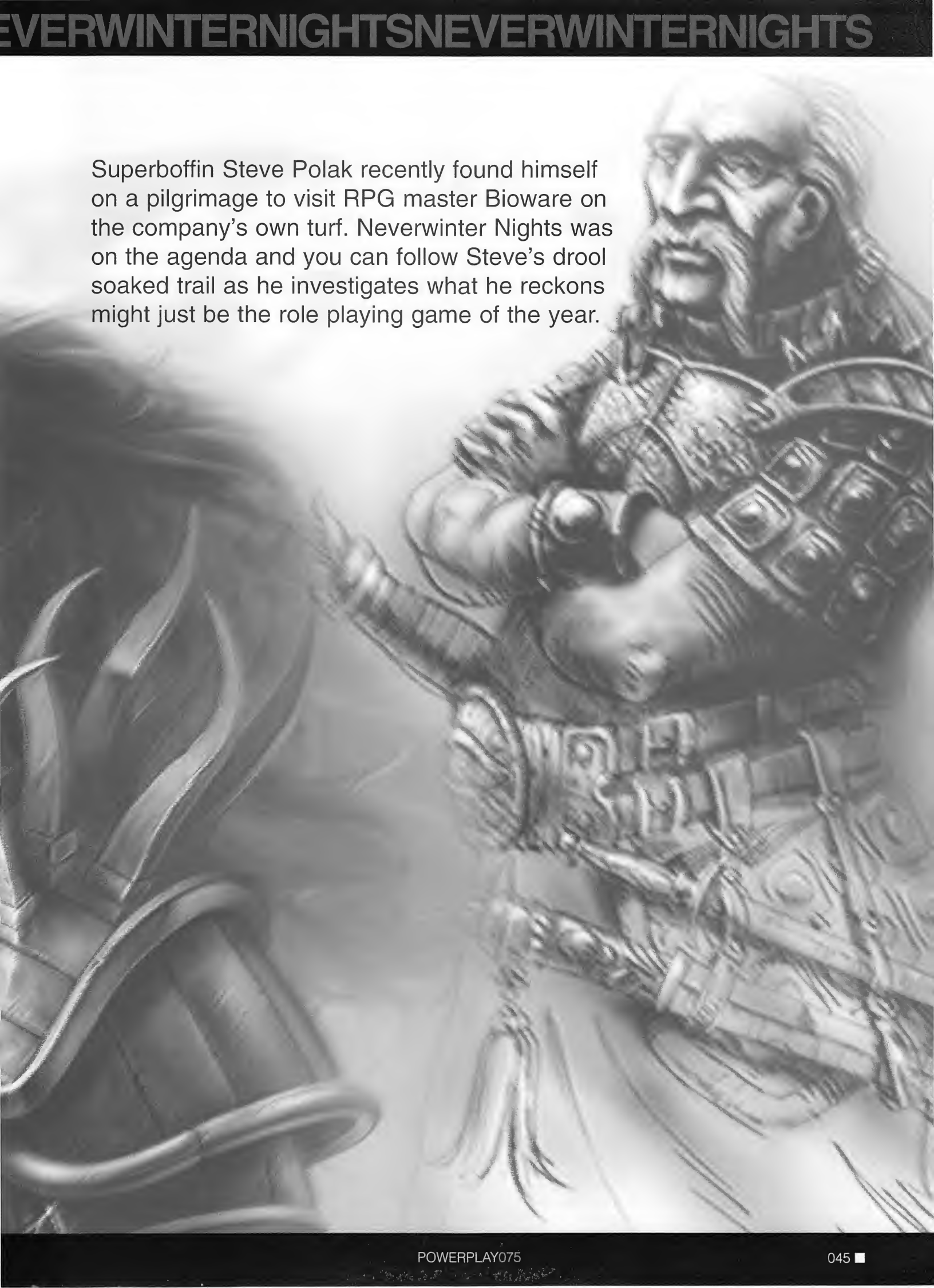


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Neverwinter Nights



Superboffin Steve Polak recently found himself on a pilgrimage to visit RPG master Bioware on the company's own turf. Neverwinter Nights was on the agenda and you can follow Steve's drool soaked trail as he investigates what he reckons might just be the role playing game of the year.



After languishing in the doldrums of disinterest for a couple of years in the mid nineties the RPG has really come into its own with a number of great games having made goblin smashing fashionable once more.

Until now, there have generally been two types of RPG on offer. Those of you with a thirst for action have gone nuts for clickfests like *Diablo* and a gaggle of imitators, while the more patient have enjoyed variations on the superb *Baldur's Gate* formula developed by the Black Isle/Bioware studios.

With the latest effort to come from Bioware's Edmonton HQ, *Neverwinter Nights*, we now have a game which delivers gameplay to suit both groups.

In the singleplayer game, which is what you'll probably experience when you first get your hands on the code, the protagonist is a lone adventurer who has just completed training at the *Neverwinter Academy*. While going through your final trials you find that the town, which has long been a defensive bastion protecting the lands of Faerun against antisocial hordes, is under attack. Since a plague known as the Wailing Death has severely depleted the local garrison, you are quickly conscripted into the town guard. So with people dropping like flies (and noisy ones at that with all this bloody wailing!) you are sent to try and restore order.



So you want options?

Before you get started, there is the option of selecting from one of the pre-generated characters or you can do what most

hardcore RPG fans love - fiddle with the character creation options to try and get the best character to suit your style. There is a huge selection of pre-made characters on offer, but the options are greater should you choose to create an adventurer from scratch. At the simple end of the choice spectrum you can be male or female and choose from one of the following racial groupings: human, dwarf, elf, halfling, gnome, half-elf and half-orc. On top of this there are 11 classes on offer which are as varied as they are interesting. If you want to be a barbarian, bard, paladin, ranger, cleric, druid, fighter, monk, rogue, sorcerer or wizard, then so be it. The choice is yours.

Then it's time to select the most fashionable outfit for your new adventurer, pick an alignment and distribute your ability points in the most useful way across the usual categories - strength, dexterity, wisdom, intelligence, constitution and charisma. Following this is a tutorial walk-thru level which sees

the player exploring the basic interface and movement functionality systems. This can be skipped, but it's worth checking out as it's quick to get through and dovetails nicely with the beginning of the plot.

Before long you are sent on a quest to find the mythical animals believed to be a cure for the plague and do your best to quell a prison break in the northern end of town. Then the plot really starts to hot up with scattered hilarity and many interesting twists.

Indeed the one thing which struck us about the singleplayer mode is how good the script is and how funny some of the encountered characters can be. At one point you get heckled by one of the ringleaders of the



The rules of Fight Club

The first rule of Fight Club NWN-style is that it is insanely vicious. The basic idea in this tournament mode is that you can summon creatures of your own design into an arena to see if they can trash those designed by someone else. This aspect is slightly reminiscent of the fabulous *Bullfrog* classic *Dungeon Keeper*, in that you can magically summon creatures to a big beat em up where they go nuts and try to take out the forces of the other player. This mode was perhaps the least well developed of those we saw at Bioware, but despite some network problems, it was still pretty cool.

Some of the massive creatures you can summon would scare the willies out of most mere mortals and it was great to see fire giants, balrogs, high level undead and more dragons than at a Chinese New

Year parade, smacking the snot out of one another.

The tournament mode is intense and also very funny. We summoned a horde of killer chickens who tried in vain to take on a massive Ettin who simply swatted them about like the vermin they were. The other beautiful part of Fight Club is that you can gain a better understanding of the powers of different creature types, their special abilities and the huge selection of spells on offer. Firing off loads of spells in this mode was addictive beyond description because you know you don't have to conserve them for day-to-adventuring. Fight Club will need to be more clearly defined before it is released, but it looks like being a lot of fun for anyone who has enjoyed games like *Dungeon Keeper* and *Black & White*.



prison break from behind a very secure locked door. No matter what you say the cheeky bugger behind the door refuses to let you in as he reckons it's much more fun to taunt from within.

New rules, new possibilities

The game uses 3rd edition Dungeons & Dragons rules which certainly makes NWN more flexible. In case you aren't familiar with 3rd edition rules you will need to select skills as your character progresses making for more personalised and realistic character development. If all of this sounds too fiddly, Bioware have included default options which are logical and make the decisions for you.

These 3rd edition rules are something new to a Bioware adventure. Another element which breaks new ground is the

use of real 3D characters, making Neverwinter Nights one of the best looking RPGs in development. The game is set in 3D, delivering better looking characters and environments as well as some really snazzy spell effects. There are also heaps of cool graphical details like the chests which actually unlock and open in 3D and other interactive scenery elements found in the gameworld. Simply put, the static screenshots on these pages do not do the game justice as the visuals are so much more tantalising when motion is added to the equation.

The use of a real time approach to the action is also interesting in that 'real time' and 'strategic gameplay' are concepts which are often mutually exclusive. But fear not. The way the action works is actually quite simple, with you having the ability to pause the proceedings to make strategic decisions. The fact that Neverwinter Nights sees the player in control of single characters also makes this real time approach more manageable in gameplay.

Muzyka makes people come together

Bioware joint CEO Ray Muzyka believes that customisation to suit all sorts of tastes was a clear goal in developing the game.

"We wanted to make the game something which would appeal to a variety of players. If the single player game is what you primarily choose to buy Neverwinter for, then we have to make sure it is satisfying enough on its own and we have to make sure the interface is tailored to your needs. That is why we have a lot of options which you can indulge in or

ignore and choose the preset recommendations we have put in there. We want to make the game as deep or simple as the player wants. If you don't want to get too into character creation or customisation then we will manage that for you, but if you do it is ALL there in its glory. There are some elements of AD&D which some people might find too complex and when these occur we have set up interface elements which let you opt out of managing them, and we are very pleased with that."

The invisible interface

The interface borrows substantially from the successful Baldur's Gate approach, but with many improvements. A lot has been done to make the interface more flexible with more than one way of doing most things.

The core interface element is a circular menu called up with a mouse click which has sub-menu options radiating from the centre. This menu is very easy to use,

has lots of options and is animated in a context sensitive way to reflect the sorts of options you're likely to want to use. It also disappears when you aren't using it, so you can rely on hot keys or just have a cleaner screen to focus on what's happening in the gameworld.

As Trent Oster, the project lead, explained, "We have tried to make the interface as transparent as possible. We think we have only done a good job with the interface when people don't comment on it and don't notice it. In other words it is an invisible tool which people use to play the game."

"I wanted to make it so you could perform action in a number of different ways and if you felt it was possible, then damn it, I wanted us to make it possible. For example, casting a fireball. You can choose a fireball from the spell list on the interface and then select a location, or you can select it using a hot key, or you can target the location first and then select the fireball afterwards. I wanted the game to be that flexible that you could take any of these paths depending on your play style. The less we block play options by forcing people to go through menus in a specific order the more we have succeeded in making the interface transparent."

Another impressive feature is that all the maps and journals update automatically and can be accessed easily so you know where you are and what you should be doing at all times. Even if these elements aren't very sexy, they still add to the sense of attention to detail which oozes from the code's pores.





While you play NWN as a single character, you aren't always alone. You'll enlist the help of NPCs from time to time, but these guys won't be directly under your control. Instead you will be able to make simple suggestions to them, which for the most part they will try to follow. This change of focus makes a lot of sense when you remember that the game's multiplayer action sees you controlling single players as well.

Yes Master!

So Neverwinter Nights looks like being a great stand-alone singleplayer adventure, but to leave it at that would mean barely scratching the game's surface. Certainly the fact that NWN is the first D&D title to feature an online

Dungeon Master is pretty bloody significant.

In case you've never played Dungeons & Dragons in its pen and paper incarnation, the DM is a person who 'runs' the adventure by controlling all of the non-player characters (good or bad) that players interact with. The DM familiarises players with the gameworld and enforces the rules. It's the DM's job to describe what the world looks, smells and sounds like. In NWN the DM does very similar things.

We have seen other games, like Vampire: the Masquerade, try to introduce the concept of online game management by a non-player who orchestrates the adventure for the other online players. Now however, Neverwinter looks like being the first game to get this approach right. Masquerade was very poorly implemented and downright frustrating to play.

In Neverwinter Nights you will be able to meet up online with a number of mates and go on an adventure moderated by another

person who introduces new characters, manages conversations and sculpts the challenges of the game to the skills and styles of the players. This is a great and hugely ambitious idea, but it looks like NWN has successfully implemented it. We got to play though a simple moderated scenario and it was mighty special stuff.

When wondering about the place, unless you could see the DM's screen, you'd think you

were in a normal multiplayer computer adventure. Enemies would pop up and the only time you'd realise they were controlled by another person was when they called you by your name and made fun of the intimate things only someone who knows you can make fun of. Certainly a human DM, especially one who knows you personally, should make a game more fun as they can engage you more directly, making jokes and responding on a personal level.

The sense of seamlessness was amazing as all sorts of DM-controlled creatures would amble up and you'd have to deal with the quests being created for you in real time. NWN also allows players to attack any of the DM-controlled characters. However only some would be mortal and, of course, the DM could simply summon more in real time, kill you, or even kill and then resurrect your sorry arse with a warning that "the gods have given you another chance, but you'd better start flying straight and stop killing everyone you come across."

The toolset

Even after you play through the singleplayer campaign, smite your mates in Fight Club mode (see p46) and gone on online adventures with your friend as Dungeon Master (soon to be the bane of your existence), there is still heaps to do as the toolset which will ship with the game lets you build complete worlds from scratch. You might have enjoyed a certain section in the singleplayer or DM game, but felt it could have gone in another direction. Well Wisenheimer, you'll be able to test your world designing skills as the toolset is the same software Bioware used to build the campaigns included with the

Hairy nostrils?!

A very flexible camera control system lets you get right up in the face of your character when you feel like it or pull back to a more traditional long-range RPG perspective when trying to see what's happening nearby. The camera controls are simple to use and the zoom really lets you appreciate just how detailed the characters in the game are. You probably won't play the majority of the game from this close-up view,

but it certainly adds a personal touch, a bonus being that you can almost see the hair up your virtual avatar's nostrils.

The flexible camera system also lets you rotate your view through 360 degrees with three default modes. All of these options help you to appreciate how powerful the game's 3D engine is and how it can be customised to suit a range of tastes.





game, and as such it is mighty powerful code.

We spent a couple of hours with one of the lead designers taking us through a toolset tutorial and it was quite an experience. Even after 26 hours of energy-sapping, jetlag-inducing travel in a big ol' jumbo, it was amazing how easy it was to build our own levels and put in some rather complex scripted gameplay events and characters.

Make the land in your own image

The first step is laying down the tile set for an area, creating party exit and entry points which are connected to other gameworld areas. You can then choose from a huge list of demographic tiles to define the area. There are so many different tiles and objects to toss into the arena that the possibilities would exhaust most designers. Indeed any area type from the game can be completely recreated using the toolset. There's some really gory atmospheric stuff too! Impaled bodies, loose limbs, ruined temples, massive trees and waterfalls were just some of the elements we chucked into our forgotten realm. You can even edit the existing pre-packaged campaigns from the ground up, changing anything at all.

As joint CEO of Bioware Greg Zeschuk put it, "If there is a part of the adventure we have made that you would have criticised for whatever reason, we now say you can go change it to suit yourself, as all of the tools are there. This is a pretty radical move, but we expect to see some great campaigns being created using the toolset, and if you make a scenario which is good enough you will probably wind up working with us. We also aim to have a community-controlled website where you can download the best new campaigns and find out about other happenings in the NWN world. There will be places to swap campaigns, meet new DMs and meet your friends online. Even though we are soon to finish the game the plan is that the

development is only just beginning at this point."

Having laid down your basic area tiles with items like bridges, tombs, huts, caves and just about anything else imaginable, you can then create creatures and items to populate the new gameworld. The creature generator is brilliant as you can tweak everything, from the creature's appearance to its allegiances, statistics and basic attack and defence skills. Similarly, items like swords can be altered to feature new magical abilities (or curses) and change their appearance.

The first pizza RPG?

Once this is done, it's very simple to place these elements in your 3D world, which by now is starting to look like a proper fantasy realm. However there is still so much more to do before you are finished. The scripting language in the toolset is a work of art. It might take some people a while to get the hang of, but basically you can type in conversation elements and then insert conditional 'if->then' statements into the dialogue scripting. For example an NPC could ask where the 'Holy Pizza

Something wicked this way comes...

In Neverwinter Nights the DM has the ability to summon players to any area in the gameworld in case you get horribly lost. He/she can also create objects out of thin air and talk individually to characters without the rest of the party knowing. Basically if you have ever played pen and paper D&D and understood what the DM did there, the same should be possible in this amazing game.

The game will ship with a number of predetermined scenarios to play with a DM. However without the ability to fully write your own adventures the 'DMing' in the game would eventually lose its attraction. Thankfully Bioware know this and have put together the most incredible toolset you will ever see for an adventure RPG.

Cutter of Doom' is located and if you choose the correct dialogue response the NPC might reward you with some useful information. Offer the wrong answer and they might turn you into pepperoni. This is ultra cool as it lets you set the agendas, put in the script and set the conditions.

In other words, even though you can run the gameworld as a DM, handling all the conversations and encounters in real time, the game lets you set up pre-scripted encounters where the party meets a character and things happen depending on how you respond

to it in conversation.

The toolset was a real highlight of the visit as it ensures the success of the game beyond what predetermined gameplay Bioware have crammed into the box.

Neverwinter Nights looks like it might just be RPG game of the year and, after all, it's been a while since we have hungered so desperately to get our hands on a new game. After much testing and trialing, the only question remaining unanswered is whether Bioware is on the verge of creating a new RPG genre?

Steve Polak



We Are Not Alone

Timothy C. Best investigates the social evolution of gaming, to check out where some of the stereotypes come from and how people will be playing together in days yet to come.

Why are people who play PC games classically thought of as pasty-faced geeks who can't talk face to face with another human unless it's about Star Trek? Why is it console game players can get away with a "big kid" tag if they have a sports game or two lying around? It's a games culture thing. Culture is like a wave that picks us up and leaves us on new shores, even if we don't see the skyline change. Like right now, because games are changing. Notions of how we play games and what we do and how we interact are changing. With phrases like "geek chic" coming into being and a realisation that people formerly dubbed propellerheads were just ahead of the game, new definitions of game geek and those who are just hip to the times are needed. How has this all happened? PCPP is here to take you on the nickel tour.

Tennis for Two - William Higinbotham, Brookhaven National Laboratory

Magnavox Odyssey is the first home games system

Atari Home Pong hits the streets and is well received

Atari 2600 home games console goes on sale

IBM releases first PC known as the IBM XT

1958

1973

1974

1978

1981



Commodore in days of yore



Cheesy wood panelling

Before the PC

Way back in the mists of time there was a game called Tennis For Two. It was designed by William Higinbotham at the Brookhaven National Laboratory to distract people from the nuclear tests at the research centre (or so the story goes). It was, you guessed it, for two.

In 1977 we got our greasy hands on the Atari 2600 complete with two joysticks.

This wasn't unique - all of the early games consoles came with a couple of joysticks, everything from ColecoVision to Vic-20s.

This was a living room thing. Most of these games machines used a TV as the monitor and that led to sharing the thing with family members, if not friends. There was a mindset that a bunch of people would sit around a TV and that's what people did.



What's that black thing?



Lifelike graphics

TV, the mentality surrounding early PCs was more, "Honey, I'm working. Can't be disturbed right now," then sneaking in a few hours of Zork (n.b. Zork rhymes with Dork - no coincidence).

Then 1984 saw Elite released on the BBC Acorn and the appearance of King's Quest on PC. King's Quest was one of the first animated cartoon-style adventure games where you could

see your character, his world and animations of how he interacted with that world. The game made Sierra (and its co-founder Roberta Williams) a global gaming power and ushered in the PC Age of Adventure.

Then in 1987 LucasArts came to the party with Maniac Mansion. Both Sierra and Lucas had a string of subsequent hits including Space Quest, Police Quest, Sam and Max Hit the Road, Monkey Island and many more.

The vast majority of these games were very much singleplayer experiences, from Zork to Monkey Island. It made sense. So you could get work done on them, PCs were rarely in "family" areas. Monitors were smaller than TVs and the user sat much closer to the display, meaning that there wasn't quite the same room for a crowd.



> Ask man about gate

In 1992 the fledgling gaming world was rocked by Civilization. This strategic empire-building classic did little for gamers' reputations as antisocial, inarticulate freaks. So PC gaming remained a solitary pursuit.

This was exacerbated by the fact that Internet games were still very limited, mainly text-based and in the prehistoric days of the early nineties, gamers leant more



Guilt-free criminal deals

toward bulletin board services than the Internet. At these BBSs turn-based, multiplayer text games such as Barren Realms Elite were the rage (there's only so much you can do with a 2.4K modem). You might also have caught some play-by-mail roleplaying games if you were lucky.

So multiplayer on PC remained the domain of the lonely, the geeky or the obsessed. But all this was about to change.

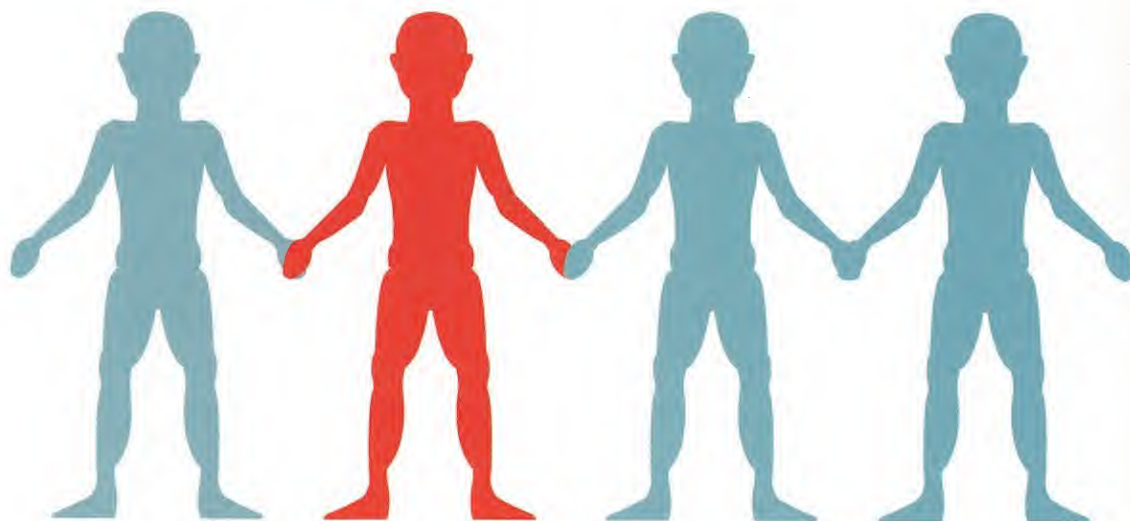
The id of gaming

In 1992 id struck with Castle Wolfenstein 3D. The world had never seen anything quite like it. Wolf3D dropped you directly into

The coming of PC

The first home PC came out in about 1981 and was an expensive piece of hardware. Beyond that, many people actually owned them for work purposes. Playing console-style games on them would be like going out on the weekend in school uniform. No, PCs were for more adult use - the games that WERE played were thinking games such as Zork, Planetfall and Reach for the Stars.

Whereas the mentality surrounding consoles had been one of sitting around the family



Castle Smurfenstein, one of the first Mods, arrives on the scene

Videogame crash in an over-saturated market with people looking towards PCs

Nintendo Entertainment System hits the US showing videogames still have a place

Id makes waves with Wolf 3D and realises that fan mods can extend game life

Id does it again with Doom, adding four-player LAN support

1983

1984

1985

1992

1994

► it and it was macho too. Blowing things to bits was almost as non-geeky as playing sports games.

Id followed Wolf3D with Doom, which really got the ball rolling. Doom even had a four-player LAN mode providing some excellent multiplayer action, but the setup was so arcane it virtually required goat sacrifices to get going.

The gifted did manage somehow, and the kids at id realised that playing human versus human offered a task more challenging than they could muster with mere AI. It also



offered bragging rights.

Doom spawned many clones but id didn't mind. The company was busy working on Quake.

Quake and after shocks

The release of Quake in 1996 was to have a huge affect on gaming. Many factors intersected to create the social phenomenon that was Quake.

The year before, PlayStation had been launched and, due to Sony's brilliant marketing, the console was taking the world by storm. Sony's games seemed to target a different audience to previous consoles and looked to hook a young adult audience who weren't traditionally gamers. The combination of Sony's game system and its music label led to Wipeout, a game which featured the sounds of the Chemical Brothers, the Prodigy and Orbital. Gran Turismo brought home the power of the PSX and opened up the gaming market. It was becoming cool to have a PlayStation and play games over a beer with your mates.



Around this time kids had been managing to convince parents that they needed a PC for educational purposes, a proposition that was given extra weight by the growing popularity, accessibility and credibility of the Net.

Id wrote Quake for network play from the ground and had to really mess with Windows settings to do it. Quake's network code was leading-edge, so setting up a multiplayer game in this true 3D world was more than possible. It was comparatively easy.

The technology wasn't the only innovation id had in mind. One of



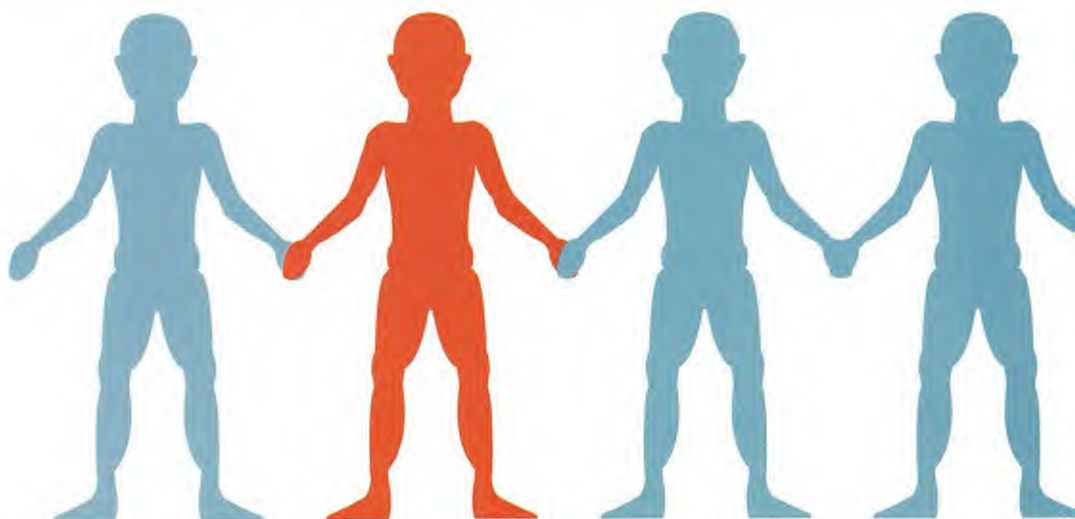
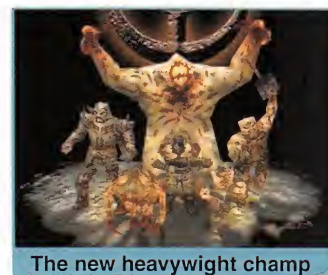
its founders John Carmack held the Berkley-esque notion that "information just wants to be free". This combined with lessons learnt from Doom and even Wolf3D (games which proved that fan-created material could add life to a product) led id to release Quake C which spawned the very first Quake mods.

New social order

People started banding together in more than just loose clubs. They started creating clans. Mods such as Capture the Flag and TeamFortress came out soon

after Quake's release and pushed team play to the next level, causing clans to take on military-style training routines and strategy meetings.

Quake tournaments came into being and some people even went professional, living off prize money like pro-athletes (the rare ones in the US at any rate). The clan members were not the geeks we were used to like Matthew Broderick in War Games. They were more like the play-hard, die-stylishly characters of William Gibson's Cyberpunk. These guys might



PlayStation hits the scene targeting an older, hipper audience

Diablo reinvents RPGs. Battle.net makes it much easier to catch an online game

Quake C released to help fans write code for the game. WorldCraft level-editor released

Quake released. Unprecedented online game support. 16-person multiplayer. Clans begin forming

Golden Eye hits Nintendo console introducing many to FPS

1995

1996

1996

1996

1997

have been cooler than the standard nerd but they were even less accessible.

Quake took on these social aspects for the simple reason that playing against a person was more fun shooting a computer that didn't really care. You could trash talk, you could earn respect and you could shut people up with a well-placed shotgun blast. You could do it all without leaving your home. It was fun, it was social. Reputations and even legends like Thresh were created - don't tell me the specialist in the FPS X-Files episode wasn't Thresh-based.

There were some limits to this notion of social play, though. The game just formed an arena and a set of rules for the game. You played through the single player to get your skills up and then you took it online. Another game released in 1996 changed the perception of gaming, ushering in a new age of social interaction.

Dancing with Diablo

Diablo allowed fans to play with or against up to three other players through the entire singleplayer game. Blizzard's Battle.net online matching system also made it a breeze to find an open game. This accessibility and the popularity of the game meant that the notion of multiplayer games expanded. You didn't just have to have two teams

fighting in a static environment (like an arena), you could have friends play through an entire adventure - them against the game.

Sure, you could play through Double Dragon in the arcades in the late 80s with a friend but you were tied to one screen, no development and one set path.

In a real sense, Quake and Diablo together broke the old notion of online gaming. Soon people came to expect a multiplayer component to their PC games and even if people

hadn't played online they had at least heard of those "Quake freaks".

By 1998 we had an atmosphere where the Net was accessible and people were well used to the idea of playing games online. In fact, gamers almost demanded multiplayer elements in any new release.

PC games had gone from something you did alone and then compared notes about with your friends, to something you and your friends experienced together.

While it had once been true

that the act of gaming had been antisocial (even though talking about it afterwards wasn't) Quake games now led people from different states to come together and go out for drinks.

Gaming had become the ideal social activity for modern times. You could sit alone in a room and actually be interacting with dozens of people - pull a plug and they were gone. Alternately, you could be sitting in a room filled with people and be typing messages to them. ASL?

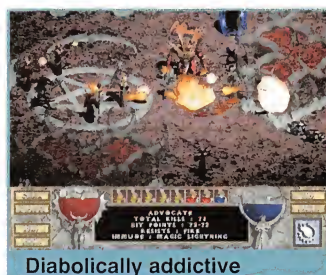
Swimming up mainstream

PlayStation continued to expand its market, hitting a "street" audience with the phenomenal hit that was Tony Hawk's Pro Skater. Cyprus Hill signed on to Kingpin because they kept a PlayStation in their limo, and Coolio turned up at E3.

Will Wright grabbed the mainstream on the PC with the Sims, a game that hasn't fallen out of the Top 10 best sellers in the two years that it's been out.

Online games such as Spades, Poker and Bridge went through the roof as people took five minutes out from their jobs to click through a few hands. Computers were becoming everyday, so computer games were becoming everyday. Coolness was based on a per-game basis.

Geek chic began getting noticed and thrives through the popularity of Buffy, Star Wars re-releases, Lord of the Rings movies and bands celebrating the weird and nerdy like Smashing Pumpkins and Ben Folds Five. It was as if the geek had gone from loner weirdo who couldn't make a friend to save his or her life, to someone who was simply ahead of the game. Now, when I tell a cute girl at a club that I review computer games for a living they tend to think it's cool and profess a soft spot for something like Sonic the



Ultima Online opens its doors: the world's first massively multiplayer online world

Shooter genre expanded and id challenged: Half-Life, Unreal and Thief released

The Wheel of Time incorporates mod-induced creation into the core of its gameplay

Tony Hawk is a smash hit on PlayStation, bringing street cred to gamers

Vampire: Redemption tries to supply tools to allow pen-and-paper style Dungeon Mastering

1997

1998

1999

1999

2000



King Hawk of the Bones Brigade



► Hedgehog, Tomb Raider or Phantasmagoria III. This, my friends, was not always the case.

The future evolution

In a lot of ways Quake was so big and pushed things so far so quickly that people have been stuck in deathmatch or CTF mode ever since, because if you look through the multiplayer options on offer in even the latest and greatest games, you'll see

that they haven't strayed far from the models set in place by Diablo and Quake.

To predict the next stage of gaming evolution, we must look back to some slightly more obscure games: 1999's *Wheel of Time* and 2000's *Vampire: the Masquerade - Redemption*. The *Wheel of Time* multiplayer game evolved straight out of the modding scene. In it, players would create a castle to defend their relics while trying to grab the opposition's power items - all without being blasted to bits. The castle creation involved a straight-forward level editor to create specialist obstacles for your foes.

Vampire on the other hand came with a full Dungeon Master mode, allowing a human storyteller to create a complete adventure. The storyteller could place items and jump in at any

time to control any NPC and its dialogue. The problem was that it was trickier than juggling a chainsaw, two bowling pins and a couple of puppies, while being considerably less entertaining.

Along this line of thinking and in a more general sense, the upcoming *Neverwinter Nights* (see page 44) is the next evolutionary step. It takes the best of the modding scene and combines it with the best of *EverQuest*. EQ allows players to find and go on adventures with like-minded people from around the world and social skills are almost as important as stats on a server. But beyond the bugs and immature power-gamers out to prove how tough they are at all costs, EQ also suffers from a lack of true quests. With so many players they have to be generic in nature and

eminently reusable.

Neverwinter Nights moves the creative power from the hands of the software company into the hands of the players. Modding becomes central to the game, not something that is special or arcane but something that IS the game. *Dungeon Masters* take the tools the developers create and use them to make the adventure. You don't develop the whole world, just the tale you want to tell and the computer generates the rest (with your permission).

The evolution is that the experience is totally two-way, like a live band. You know the players and they know you. The world reacts to what they do and not necessarily in the most impartial way (as a kick-arse AI would handle things) but in a way that furthers the story or is more fun for the players (DM included).



Gamespy Arcade is up and running, matching people together for online games

The Sims released, further wedging PC games into the mainstream

Ghost Recon appears as an example of a full co-op tactical FPS game

Valve releases Steam, a broadband software distribution system

Neverwinter Nights on the eve of release - best DM-enabled RPG ever?

2000

2000

2001

2002

NOW

The world is ever-changing.

Players could pay workers to build their castles complete with traps and guards and have the DM build it into the world, complete with sabotage plots, attacks and so on. Maybe you don't want any of those things to interrupt your grand designs but you can decide. Ultima and EverQuest have allowed a lot of those elements but the key is that you give the tools to the person you want for the game you want.

People don't just want to share the world together; they want to make it together.

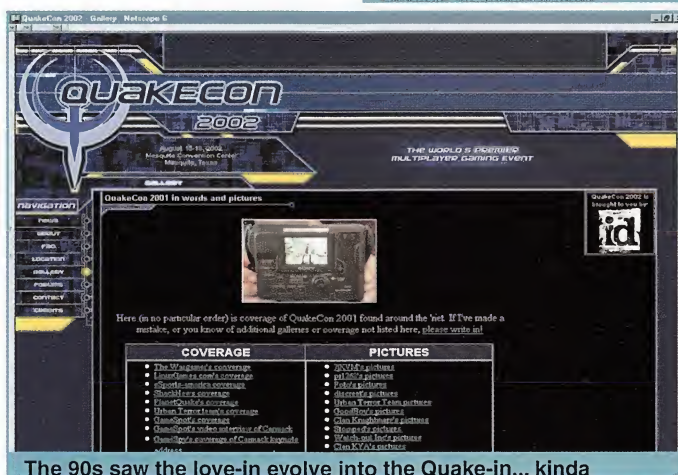
Technology (the final cycle leading to Skynet)

Finally, there are the technological factors which will influence the way games are played. Things like High Definition TV will allow console games to be played at a much higher resolution. Larger TV screens will also allow developers to code in more complicated shared-screen multiplayer elements, so maybe games like Neverwinter Nights will transfer easily from PC to Xbox or PS2.

Apparently, Microsoft is going to push its microphone technology with the Xbox and advances in voice-recognition might mean that a keyboard can be replaced even for the most complicated of games. This all goes to more people sitting in the

living room interacting in more complicated ways in more complicated games, not to mention the online possibilities that are opened up.

Lighter or cloth-like flexible monitors will also make taking your computer to a friend's house more of an option. PCs might even replace books in D&D sessions of the future. I have friends who run their D&D



The 90s saw the love-in evolve into the Quake-in... kinda

characters, that is keep track of all their bonuses and other stats, on a laptop they bring with them.

It's natural that as computers become more and more integrated into everyday life, games and other social activities will shift into the digital. Just look at SMS.

To sum up, we've moved from no AI (Pong) to a pre-set world to



Those "Quake freaks"

explore (text adventures) to basic AI (King's Quest through Doom) and back to no AI (multiplayer deathmatch games like pre-bot Quake). Then as AI technology and computers got more powerful we've come back to the AI in games like Half-Life and Black & White. The next stage is the co-operative AI that helps people run a game, bringing their imagination to life so they can share tailor-made experiences with friends who help them build the world.

Until then, computer games continue to grow more mainstream and branch into training, work and social life - so just wait and see, the geek may just inherit the earth.

Timothy C Best



Geek culture at home

Mods - the way of the future

Well, back in '83 there was Castle Smurfenstein, but that sure wasn't how the game came out of the box. Scott Miller, who was working at Apogee, was amazed to see user created levels for Duke Nukem springing from the 1990 release.

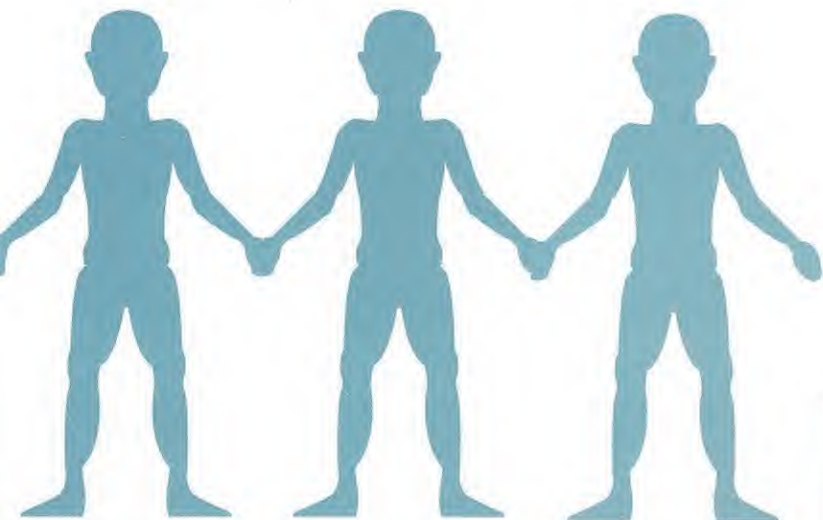
When Castle Wolfenstein 3D rolled in a couple of years later, there were enough hacker alterations to the game to make id take notice. The new material kept the hardcore coming back for more and this early fan material started to bring modding from the naughty outer to become the driving force of the industry.

Modding changed forever in 1996 with Quake and the tools released for it that encouraged users to get in there - I'm not sure what id's copyright lawyers had to say. Several users noticed the official Quake editors were tricky to use and needed a big-mofo PC to run. Nineteen-year-old Ben Morris released WorldCraft, which surpassed anything id provided and quickly became level editor of choice. That same year, Quake TeamFortress was created and released. It added character classes such as the scout, heavy weapons guy, engineer and sniper to the game, giving it a realistic setting. TeamFortress was huge and won at least two members of the original team programming and design jobs at Valve, where they are developing TF2 after working on the multiplayer module for Half-Life.

Multiplayer Half-Life in turn was modded into Counter-Strike, a game so popular that Valve has packaged it and sold it commercially. More than a million copies have been sold even though the whole thing can be legally downloaded for free.

Although Valve has been missing in action regarding TeamFortress2, it hasn't been completely inactive. Valve has released a software application called Steam that allows flexible billing for broadband software delivery, ensures version matching, has anti-piracy elements and gives users instant access to updates and mods. Such investment in development time and resources goes to show where Valve thinks it's at.

It's strange to think how many industries, rather than releasing Quake C, would have hit the modding scene with a host of copyright actions. Thankfully, PC gaming industry wasn't one of them.



GameCube

Xbox

PC

PlayStation 2

Game Boy Advance

PSP

**YOUR GUIDE TO THE
FUTURE OF GAMING
AND BEYOND!**

HYPER»»

AUSTRALIA'S GAMING AUTHORITY

IN REVIEW

The most authoritative reviews around

GAMESPC

Hi Kats and Babies, another month has rolled around and with it we bring you a new grab bag of gaming goodness. This month's releases have been odd to say the least. We've been busting our butts to try to get you the newest and best of all things PC games related and I have to say, it's been a hard slog. For the most part we have sequels and addon packs. Why? Well, most every distributor we've talked to has either been holding code until after E3 (only a few scant days away at the time of this writing) or are as disappointed as we are about games being delayed. Next month with the big gaming conference out of the way should see our shelves and pages lined with so many games that it boggles the mind. We have some big hopes for E3, which with any luck will be granted. New games, new gaming styles, new characters too cool for school. It's all good baby.

We received the Tony Hawk 3 PC code this month and once again the game has impressed us all a great deal - smooth frame rates, fantastic trick runs and a pumping soundtrack. I've just put on my kevlar suit because the next thing I'm about to say will doubtlessly cause the PC purists to start hunting me between the office and home with high caliber weapons. No matter how good the PC version of Tony Hawk plays (and it plays REALLY well), the Xbox version is still a little better. Don't hurt me too bad, I'm just telling the truth. Messengers don't always deserve to be shot. The console nature of THPS3 works better on a console than it does on PC but there's no need to fret. Does anyone truly think that the Xbox version of Morrowind could possibly be as glorious as it will on the mighty PC? We think not.

Daniel Wilks
danielw@next.com.au



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THE PCPP REVIEW RATINGS SYSTEM

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 90+ | Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game. |
| 89-80 | A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field. |
| 79-60 | Competent and playable. For fans of the genre. |
| 59-40 | Decidedly average, probably boring. |
| 39-0 | A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid. |
| Need | The minimum requirements to get the game running at a playable speed. |
| Want | The ideal system requirements for the game. |
| For | The major reasons why you'll like the reviewed game. |
| Against | The major reasons why you won't. |



Tony Hawk 3



Grind, manual, vert, revert, grind - repeat if necessary

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Neversoft
PUBLISHER
Activision
DISTRIBUTOR
Activision
PRICE
\$89.95
RATING
G
AVAILABLE
Now



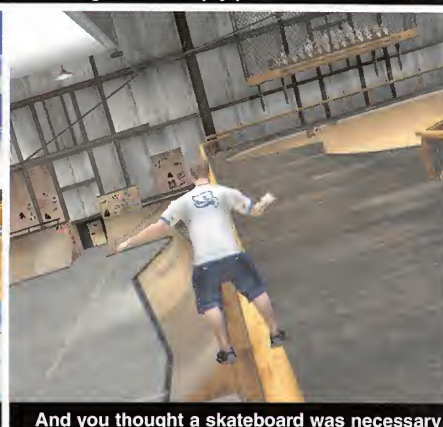
Goin' round in style



Whatever became of the good old empty pool?



Look, I'm an aeroplane



And you thought a skateboard was necessary

SYSTEM

NEED

P III 500
64Mb RAM
700Mb HDD

WANT

Duron 850
256Mb RAM
700Mb HDD
64Mb Video Card

Extrême sports games on the PC have never looked or played better than Tony Hawk 3, the latest in the series of multi-platform skateboarding games. In this incarnation of the franchise, the skaters have learned some new tricks, making for a very enjoyable and deceptively complex gaming experience. Utilising either the keyboard or a gamepad, players can get air, do flatland tricks, grind, ollie and pull off all manner of skate tricks, stringing them together using manuals and the new revert feature. Although many gamers may look at THPS3 as just another port of a console game, the PC version truly stands out on its own for a number of reasons, ranging from fantastically smooth frame rates, high-res graphics and textures, super-fast loading times and wonderful character animations.

THPS3 is an objective based game in that it asks players to complete a certain number of tasks to unlock the next level within the one or two-minute time limit. Tasks range from the mundane (score X amount of points) to the ridiculous (the Los Angeles level

requires the player to grind four specific rails to trigger the great LA earthquake). Many of the objectives may sound absolutely unfeasible but they're a blast to complete. How can you not love skating around Suburbia to find an axe to give to a creepy tall man so he can hack away some wooden planks to reveal a hidden area behind a haunted house? The new revert feature allows multiple tricks to be strung together to garner truly high scores and believe us when we say you'll need to learn how to string tricks together as the high

"How can you not love skating around Suburbia to find an axe to give to a creepy tall man so he can hack away some wooden planks to reveal a hidden area behind a haunted house?"

scores you need to complete go up exponentially. You may only need 15,000 points on the first level but it's all the way up to 500,000 by the last. Five skill points are dotted around each level allowing the player to increase different abilities to cope with the tasks to come. Many of these need to be searched for but it is

definitely recommended you take the time to do it. One skill point carefully placed can mean the difference between a huge point score and a bloody smear on the pavement.

To add to the replayability of the game THPS3 changes the mission structure for different pre-built characters and offers the player the chance to create their own character. The Create-a-Skater feature is well implemented and allows players to choose body type, sex, background, what the character wears and how skill points are distributed. Beating certain

tasks or finishing the game with different characters can unlock a number of hidden bonuses ranging from extra characters to hidden levels and different game play modes - beat the game 19 times with any character to unlock moon physics. The extra levels, characters, bonuses or physics are different enough that you'll soon find

SLAP THE MULE

Tony Hawk Pro Skater 3 comes with a number of fun multiplayer modes with names such as Slap, Mule, Keep Away and Graffiti. Over a LAN they make a fantastic alternative to your standard death match style shooters. Slap works like a deathmatch game and sees the players charging around the map, pulling off tricks whilst trying to run into the other players. By far the most fun multiplayer game is Graffiti in which players paint areas of the map by doing tricks and other players try to steal their territory by doing tricks with a higher point value.



Still no sign of Ben Lexcen's Skate-Wing



A rail-slide on a rope? Won't be trying that in real life



Paying lip service

yourself addicted to unlocking the next one. The PC version of THPS3 takes advantage of the inherent networking capability of the PC and has a built in online mode. If you get tired of playing by yourself, you can jump onto Gamespy and play against other skaters. Add to this the ability to make your own skate parks or download them from the net and you have a game that will last for a long time to come.

I've fallen and I can't get up!

The graphics for the PC version of THPS3 are by far the best of any version of the game, utilising the processing power of the PC to give us high-resolution graphics and far more advanced textures than can be shown on a television. Depending on the power of the system, Tony Hawk 3 can be displayed at resolutions ranging from 640 x 480 in 16-bit colour to 1024 x 768 in 32-bit and beyond. The higher-res graphics make a world of difference in the overall look of the game. Animations run a good deal smoother and feature some excellent cloth physics, showing the skaters' clothes billowing out behind them as

they scream up a vert ramp to catch some massive air. Fantastic skeleton animations mean that the characters move as realistically as possible. This is both a good and a bad thing. Extreme sports gaming has never looked better than it does in THPS3 but when you miss a trick, it hurts. It hurts a lot. The animations of skaters grabbing the knee you've just caused them to blow out, leaving a bloody smear on the concrete, are so realistic that you can't help but feel sympathy pains. If you don't grimace when a skater misses a grind and quickly introduces his scrotum to a rail then you're either a stronger person than we are or you're just not human.

The soundtrack for the game is excellent if a little small, with songs from big name bands like Motorhead, The Ramones and Rollins Band. The quality of the audio files is universally excellent but more range would have been nice. There's only so many times you can hear "Ace of Spades" without wanting to hunt Lemmy down and beat him to death with his own shoes. Incidental sound effects are good with special care being taken with

dialogue. Keep an ear out for some of the conversations going on around you - they may be nothing but toilet humour but they're good for a laugh.

One of the problems that plagues most of the console versions of the game is serious frame rate slow down on the busier levels. Happily the PC version plays smoothly with no real problems even at minimum system requirements. This is not to say that all is right and proper in the land of Tony. Each level seems to have an area that is slightly broken. Sometimes the clipping on ramps means that you skate into them and get stuck and some lip tricks seem to stick enabling you to pull off truly unfeasible tricks in the process. During testing a simple lip balance managed to garner over 200,000 points as the skater stayed firmly perched in his precarious position without the need to do anything. These flaws only showed up intermittently and didn't dampen the overall fun of Tony Hawk Pro Skater 3 but it is truly frustrating to have a fantastic high scoring trick run ruined by faulty game mechanics.

Daniel Wilks

RATING

FOR

- Great levels
- Massive tricks
- Fantastic replayability

AGAINST

- Some broken textures
- Repetitive soundtrack
- Addictive

OVERALL

The best extreme sports game on the PC bar none

91

Zanzarah

Zanzarah: The Hidden Demographic

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Funtastic

PUBLISHER

None

DISTRIBUTOR

THQ

PRICE

\$49

RATING

G8+

AVAILABLE

June 2002



If I only had a brain...

DEMOGRAPHIC MAGIC

You can almost see the reasoning behind Zanzarah. You're not sure about the reasoning behind the reasoning, but you can see it.

Hmmm, what's the most popular form of PC game, especially online?

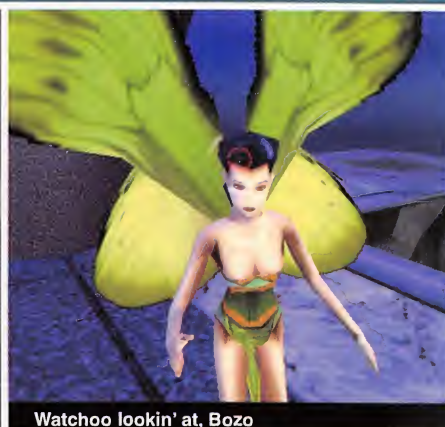
Shooters. What are the highest selling games on any platform (mainly Nintendo) and what has garnered a following of zealots in the non-electric games world?

Collector card games such as Pokemon and Magic: the Gathering. Now, if we tie them together and hit an

untapped market, you strike gold, right? You can't go wrong. Bob, I've got it! These Pokemon games have been a huge hit amongst the kids right? Which kids haven't been fully tapped yet? Girls! You know what girls like? Fairies! Fairies and enchanted forests! Yeah! Are you getting this all down? Hmmm, so we have a Pokemon-based shooter using fairies and set in an enchanted forest? Brilliant, every girl EVER will want to play it!



No Tinkerbell, I don't ever want to grow up



Watchoo lookin' at, Bozo

SYSTEM

NEED

Win98/ME/XP/2000
500Mhz CPU,
64Mb RAM, 8Mb
3D SVGA
8x CD ROM,

WANT

800+ processor,
128Mb RAM,
32Mb 3D Video
Card

Our world and Zanzarah used to be one, but slowly they separated into a world of science and a world of magic.

Now there is a problem. The fairies of Zanzarah have gone wild, sending the place dangerously out of control. To make matters worse, the shadow elves have come out of their dark holes to spread disaster. Enter our heroine Amy, a London teen with tight buns and an accent to make little Lord Fauntleroy proud.

Things get odd when she spots a fairy in her attic and, before she can say "fairy dust", Amy is whisked off to enchanted Zanzarah. She is the chosen one and must bring balance back to the land before it's too late.

All of this sounds fairly straightforward for a fantasy adventure game and it is, but the Funtastic folks weren't happy with just an adventure game. Oh no. They couldn't just have a nice fairy dragon, they had to add a goat and a lion and go for a chimera.

Zanzarah is a weird hybrid of three distinct elements: adventure game exploration, Pokemon-type card collection and first-person

shooter deathmatches. Confused? I'll try to explain.

Adventure - exploring the forest glen

For the exploration and adventure sections of the game, you control Amy from a third person perspective. Amy can run and jump and spend a lot of time collecting coins, discovering keys, finding helpful items, meeting new characters, as well as learning the history of Zanzarah and what must be done to save the world.

She will wander through rendered forests, down dwarven mines, across frosty mountain peaks, dismal swamps, enchanted forests and even

things visually stunning and it shows. Zanzarah is quite beautiful, from the lacy stone architecture to towering trees, lens flares and babbling brooks. This is one pretty title. But it's still weird.

Pokemon - Gotta collect 'em all

When the going gets tough, the tough hide behind little guys with butterfly wings, because Amy never fights. Whenever an encounter happens it's between your collection of fighting fairies and either wild fairies or another fairy-collector's host.

The system is very much like Pokemon or any collector card game.

"When the going gets tough, the tough hide behind little guys with butterfly wings... Amy never fights"

cities in the clouds. All that good fairy-fantasy stuff is here, except the unicorns standing under rainbows, and it's all full of slanting light and creepy marshes.

Since no combat happens in these sections of the game and interaction with the environment is minimal, all the designers' efforts went into making

You wander Zanzarah and capture defeated fairies (in magic spheres that you find or buy). Although you could collect every fairy in the game - totalling well over 70, many of which evolve into new creatures - you can only have five with you at any time. Choosing, capturing and developing the right combination of fairies is a key

REAL LIFE FAIRIES

Much like in the game, real fairies have always been good-for-nothing troublemakers and don't let Disney tell you otherwise. Unlike in the game, real fairies don't come in a dizzying variety - although they can glamour us to alter their appearance - they are little humanoids who are sometimes green. They aren't pixies or goblins and, in fact, they war furiously with these two factions, so don't mix them up.

If you ask a fairy, and you don't offend them by figuring out that they're a fairy despite their magic, they'll tell you that they are festive little spirits, often a little overly curious and, on the whole, neither good nor bad on a human scale.

They'll look a little embarrassed and

promptly curse you and disappear if you mention the practice of baby stealing and leaving changelings, but if you stick to other topics you'd learn about them helping farmers who let them take some of their crops and the blessing of babies at birth (before they reach a stealable age).

Other than the baby snatching (which is really better left unmentioned) fairies will tell you that humans only get in trouble when they do things like stumble blindly into a fairy rave on a moonlit walk or blunder into their living rooms on a bush trail. Since mortal humans are the only animals who can't see fairies as a matter of course, fairies just think we're rude and inconsiderate and screw us accordingly.



Amy, that's just a garden gnome



Exquisite detail: lens flare, sun glare and tight buttocks



I think we'd better leaf him alone

element of the game.

Zanzarah encourages a well thought out and balanced selection using a simple rock-paper-scissors dynamic. For example, psi fairies devastate stone fairies but in turn lose to nature fairies, and so on. If you pick the right combo, a couple of decent shots is all it takes, even if we're talking two level-30 fairies. This means you have to rotate through your collection trying to second-guess your opponent's choice of fairy.

Each fairy comes with two spell sets comprising one offensive and one defensive ability. These slots are filled with spells of your choice based on your fairy's power area (stone, darkness, cold, electricity, water, psi) and its power level within that slot. This makes for enough combinations to deliver a highly personalised army of fairies.

Fairy collection in Zanzarah is a lot of fun. The wide range of critters and evolution makes you want to play "for just one more level".

Shoot - Unreal fairy deathmatch arena

For combat, the active fairy disappears from his or her position at Amy's

shoulder and reappears in one of a number of arenas.

This deathmatch element is somewhat simplistic and Quake 3 champs will find there is little to challenge them. There is some depth to combat however. Right-clicking doesn't just jump - it takes the wee beastie up with a flap of its wings. There are critical hits, secondary damage effects and the longer the fire button is held, the more power is built up (until penalising feedback damage is accrued). Beyond that, combat is an interesting combination of fast-twitch shooting skills and strategic troop selection.

Zanzarah's for beginners so the targeting requirements are very generous. This works both ways making run-and-gun dodging tricky. One obvious tactic is to hide behind a pillar or wall until the other fairy has to discharge - or cop the overload damage - but it's hard to keep track of enemies with any precision as they move so quickly and fly so quietly.

Does magic happen?

The world looks fantastic but the

adventure elements seem to be little more than a pretty vehicle for singeing gossamer wings and gaining experience for multiplayer games. With a deep store of obscure fey mythology to draw on, the plot could have been as much a reason to find the next key and fight the next fairy as upping levels in your water attack and wanting to see more of the scenery, but alas this is not the case. But to take the glass half-full attitude, Funtastic has done well, from the beauty of the fairy world, to the clean arena fighting and the collection, development and balance of fairies.

Ultimately, you'll get well pucked-off by all the wandering and the lax targeting requirements, even if you like the variety of fairies and if you like collector card games the action will frustrate you.

Then again, if you like Pokemon, want to walk through scenic enhanced forests and deathmatch (arena-style) with the combined cast of Midsummer Night's Dream and Labyrinth, then this game will rock all of your worlds.

Timothy C. Best

RATING

FOR

- Great looking world
- Choice of fairies
- Solid if twee story

AGAINST

- Weird
- Three awkward games in one
- Repetitive

OVERALL

Fairies and deathmatch and card collecting all in one. Weird, but done well.

72

Sims Vacation

Another Sims games? Get outta town!

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Maxis
PUBLISHER
EA
DISTRIBUTOR
EA
PRICE
\$49.95
RATING
M15+
AVAILABLE
Now



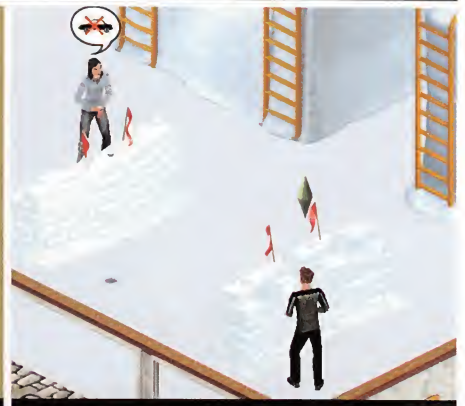
I wish he'd stop building sandcastles and come to bed



Snowsliding in shorts - real intelligent



Life's a beach



You're always erecting barriers between us

SYSTEM

NEED

Celeron 450
64Mb RAM
16Mb Videocard
400Mb HDD

WANT

Duron 550
128Mb RAM
16Mb Videocard
650Mb HDD

Maxis is back with the 5th instalment in The Sims franchise and this time they're going on holiday. Filled with new landscapes, objects, things to do and people to meet, The Sims Vacation gives you a little more scope for your creative mind to go wild. Now, you can try your hand at a luxury casino hotel, or if your mind takes you that way, a really, really seedy brothel. Anything is possible on Vacation Island. But what is it about this expansion pack that really makes you want to come back for more?

To really take advantage of all that The Sims Vacation has to offer, you'll want to have Livin' Large, House Party and Hot Date installed, as well as most things on offer in the 'Get Free Stuff' section of the Sims website (www.thesims.com).

Darling, I need a break...

Once you've installed The Sims Vacation on to the existing Sims range, you'll find that this really is an expansion of Hot Date. Most of the really big breakthroughs in the game came from its previous instalment, Vacation using these new commands

and activities in a different (and more expensive) setting. It all feels like a lead-in to The Sims Online, getting users accustomed to interacting with a wide range of 'uncontrollable' NPC Sims, both young and old, in different situations. Even character personality combinations seem to have been altered as it seems harder to get your Sims to like each other, so getting your neighbours 'busy' is a bit more of a challenge.

Working on all the added features that Hot Date gave The Sims, your Sim is now able to book a holiday over the phone for \$500 Simoleons. And just like the previous game, it's possible to

"Oddly enough, keeping your Sim happy on Vacation Island is pretty hard work"

invite a friend on holidays with you where they get to join in the fun, share some quality time and share a bed. Going it alone leaves your Sim free to make new friends, or just relax by themselves without affecting existing relationships. One thing you can't do is go from Downtown to Vacation Island and vice versa.

So, Hawaii or Aspen?

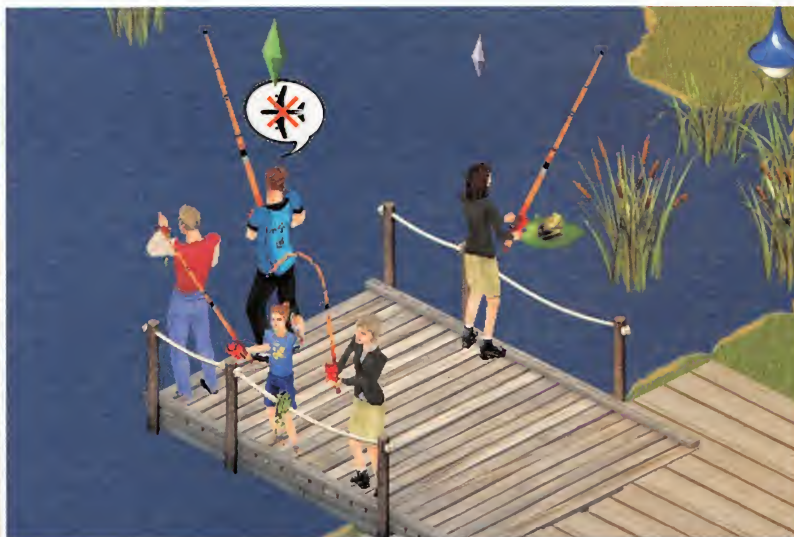
Vacation Island is designed in the 'something for everybody' theme, where you can stay at the snow-peaked slopes of Old Volcano Way, and the evergreen woods and sparkling beaches of Lagoon Moon Road. The Vacation map is split into these three categories, with some undeveloped places left for you to play with. All vacation plots come standard with phone booths and a mailbox for your Sim to send postcards to their friends from (which then increases your relationship score with them). As with Hot Date, one phone call can

either take you home or whisk you away to another location on the Vacation Island map, and also like Hot Date, you cannot edit the scenery or save your game when you are on Vacation Island with your Sim.

At each location, accommodation varies from luxury suites to camping in



Simian amusements



In a perfect world, there is no Rex Hunt



Hello widdle puppy, prepare to meet your maker



Out of the way, you shower head

ROSEBUD

You can work your Sim to the bone so they can enjoy creature comforts and even a holiday, but why bother when cashing them up is so easy?

In the game, press and hold Ctrl + Shift + C, you should then see a grey text box in the top left hand corner. Type in 'rosebud' (or 'klapaucius' on the un-patched Sims) and hit enter. Cha-ching! 1000 Simoleons get added to your cash flow. Press Ctrl + Shift + C again, then type '!:!:!:!' and press enter and cha-ching - 5000 Simoleons (you get the picture?). I usually stock up in 25k groups and use the magic that is copy and paste. Other commands you may find useful: SET_HOUR (1 to 24) Sets time of day SIM_LOG BEGIN/END Creates a log of your Sims history GROW_GRASS (1-150) Er, sets how fast your grass will grow

the snow - something to suit everyone, regardless of budget. But don't forget to check out of the hotel in the morning, otherwise you'll find your pockets draining fast.

A few new gameworld objects have been added: the motel bed,

combo shower and bath stall, check-in table, souvenir stand, change tents, a slide for the pool and a winter clothing rack. New activities to keep your Sim entertained include fishing, snowboarding, volleyball, snowslide, a plethora of amusement games (collect tickets to win a prize!) and even a snowman to build. There are also standard activities included such as pool, poker machines, singing around the campfire and relaxing in the hot tub. But is this enough?

I'm hungry!

One of the problems with Vacation is a lack of items-crossover between modules. For example, there seems to be no way of placing an *a la carte* restaurant in a new hotel complex. Almost everything else from Hot Date seems to be available on Vacation Island except for waiters and busboys. Buffet tables seem to be the closest you can get, but I found that I couldn't get my Sim's date to eat from it (go figure). Sleeping in a tent or igloo also seems an issue for a guest Sim, as well as taking a

shower. Most activities cost a lot of money, so your Sim will need to either work their buns off to earn a vacation, or you'll need to Rosebud them (see boxout) to allow them the opportunity to enjoy the island life. Food, checking in, hiring a fishing pole, picnic basket and arcade games all cost money. Plus, if you want to get on the good side of the Sim you're trying to woo, a few presents wouldn't go astray (don't forget to go Downtown before you head off on your trip).

All in all, Sims Vacations adds a bunch more things for your Sim to do. Everyone needs a break from their nine-to-five lives and nine-to-five jobs, but oddly enough, keeping your Sim happy on Vacation Island is pretty hard work. Dedication to having fun, staying social, clean and well fed (as well as having some cash in your pocket) is hard work and for the many Sims fans out there, it very well may be worth the effort. For others though, a few new items and a map won't be enough to keep them controlling their Sims daily - they'll probably stick to once a week.

Agata Budinska

RATING

FOR

- New items
- New interactions
- A taste of Sims Online?

AGAINST

- Not that new
- Few extra activities
- Just an add-on to Hot Date

OVERALL

Broadens the game even further and adds extra interactivity, but not really a must-have

67

Pac-Man All Stars

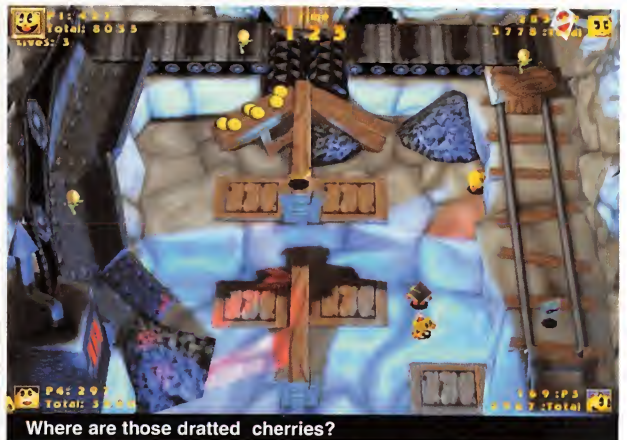
Make the bad man stop!

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Creature Labs
PUBLISHER
Infogrames
DISTRIBUTOR
Gamenation
PRICE
\$49.95
RATING
G
AVAILABLE
Now



Don't eat the funny mushrooms



Where are those dratted cherries?

SYSTEM

NEED
PIII-800
64MB RAM
TNT2 video card

WANT
Budgets spent on development rather than licences (Ouch - Ed)



Power pellet-poppin' Pac-people

TABLE TOP BONANZA

Classic arcade machines such as Pacman, Tron, Ms Pacman and Galaga are worth a great deal and not only in the hearts of gaming historians. A cocktail table model (as they are known) can set you back anywhere from \$1500 to well over \$5000. Compare that to the greatest pinball machine ever, Theatre of Magic, priced at around \$3000 second hand. One for the day you win Lotto, then.

RATING

FOR

- Fast tactical action
- 4 player!
- Familiar

AGAINST

- Little variety
- Stupid AI
- Poor singleplayer

OVERALL

If you remember Pac-Man, mourn for him.

50

The other night at an inner city pub that had recently gutted its pokie collection and returned to presenting live music (hurrah!), some mates and I found an ageing Ms Pac-Man tabletop game. One remarked Ms Pac-Man would make a delightful piece of furniture in his dingy flat, another said it was amazing how well these games stood up compared to those of today. I quietly thought to myself that at \$2 a game, nostalgia was overpriced.

Paying for the privilege

Licensing well-known characters or old favourites for a new game is common, especially by Infogrames. There are at least two titles using the chronically abused Looney Tunes characters due this year (on PC and a cast of console thousands) not to mention comic book superhero titles. Reforming an old favourite is a task that few can achieve, especially one such as Pac-Man, which would garner a sizeable licensing fee.

Enter Pac-Man All Stars, an unashamed cash cow but not complete rubbish as you might expect.

This is an arena-based item collection battle between the four "All Stars": Pac-Man, Ms Pac-Man, Pacman Jr and Professor Pac. Character selection is arbitrary as there's no noticeable difference between the four. The aim of the game is simple: collect as many power-pellets as possible while avoiding the ghosts, obstacles and other members of the Pac clan. If that was all there was, this game would be underscoring Mission Humanity.

Touch the flower

The heart of this game is that power pellets do not simply appear, they must be triggered. A number of flowers will rise from the ground and when a Pacperson runs over one, a swarm of power pellets appears. The interesting thing is that when one flower is triggered, the others disappear, so the game becomes quite tactical. A player can often get into a rhythm, running from flower to flower, picking up pellets while the others, who just missed a flower say, are left to follow and try to pick up some stray gold.

One simple aspect of the game makes it worth a look - a good basic

game mechanic. Since the flowers appear randomly and the arenas are designed with different levels of terrain, there is no way to 'cheat' proceedings by hoarding pellets.

Less is less

From this lofty achievement, it's all downhill for Pac-Man All Stars. In singleplayer, the CPU opponents must have been pulled wholesale from their original games. Path-finding deficiencies have them stuck to walls when they should be using jump pads, or worse still, huddled together while you have the run of the arena. It's nice that you can play the game four-player on one keyboard though - a bit squashy no doubt.

Pac-Man seems like an odd choice as the star of a game - little personality, no backstory - he seems to lack all the things a license should bring to a game. This is an ordinary kind of action game with a passable single player and multiplayer you wouldn't bother with on a LAN. Just like Ms Pac-man at the pub the other night, you might try it at half the price.

John Dewhurst

Tiger Woods 2002

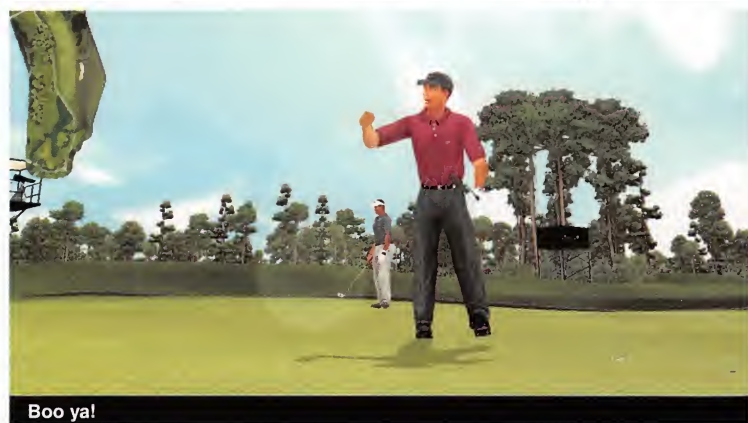
When too much golfing is barely enough



Better not cluck up with everyone watching



Cover groins, everyone. I'm whackin' it



Boo ya!

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Headgate Studios
PUBLISHER
EA
DISTRIBUTOR
EA
PRICE
\$89.95
RATING
G
AVAILABLE
Now

CUSTOM COURSES

The course designer included with Tour 2002 is quite simply fantastic. It would be difficult to make it any easier to use, or quicker. The wide range of hole and obstacle templates, all of which can be modified if you wish, ensures that even the most impatient gamers will try their hand at designing courses.

SYSTEM

NEED

Win95-XP,
PII 400, 64Mb
RAM (128 for XP)
500Mb HD

WANT

PIII 1GHz,
256Mb RAM,
64Mb Video

Golf was better when it was the preserve of chubby old white guys in pale blue stubbies and walking socks. Why? Because no one noticed it. Now it's all glamorous and sexy and in-your-face. Why? Because of Tiger Woods, that's why. Is golf even a sport? Pah! As some old wit once remarked, golf is a nice walk spoilt. But if you must golf, and on a PC, then Tiger Woods USA Tour is a damn fine choice.

Tour 2002 offers players a wide selection of options to set up the game to their own unique tastes. There are four different ways to whack the ball depending on how you like to play. The two or three mouse-click method will appeal to old school Links and PGA fans who like to exercise their pointing finger, while the two 'true swing' methods will appeal to those who prefer a more simulated approach.

Fore or four?

Tiger Woods has all the usual game types you'd expect from a top notch golf simulation: Skins, Scramble, Shootout, Greensome and more, with

each having a range of customisation options. However the most interesting games are in the new Tour Challenge mode which places increasingly difficult tasks before you, which must be overcome before moving on.

Another welcome feature of Tiger Woods Tour is the large number of courses which are built into the game. Previously most golf sims included one or two courses in the box with others released separately and expensively - a real cash cow. Tour 2002 includes six perfectly captured courses which cover a variety of terrain, ranging from the tropics of the Pacific the bleak, craggy Scottish coastline.

Playing any sports simulation against your PC is an empty challenge at best but Tiger Woods is no shirker when it comes to a challenge. EA runs multiplayer servers which any owner of Tiger Woods can log onto and play on for free. This is a reasonably rare feature for a sports title and one that adds a lot of longevity to the game. Any of the built-in game types are playable and because the game doesn't

involve the constant positional calculations of a Quake III or Counter-Strike, you don't need a particularly fast connection or an American address to play.

Tiger Woods is the best looking golf sim to date and renders everything on screen in 3D, which is a first for the genre. The ball-following camera is particularly effective in showing off the trees, ponds, streams and obstacles that make up each hole. Your golfer is also highly animated, though stands stock-still at the ready when you move the cursor to the action position.

Tiger Woods Tour 2002 combines all of EA's previous efforts in the golfing genre with a large choice of courses and modes of play to create a unique golf experience second only to the real thing. Golf gaming is a very specialised form of pleasure, but Tiger Woods serves it up sweet.

George Soropos

RATING

FOR

- Course designer
- Gameplay options
- Online support

AGAINST

- Er, it's golf?
- But some people like golf
- Apparently

OVERALL

Everything a golf gamer could want, great courses and online support.

90

Flight Hong Kong

The craziest final approach in the world

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
FlightSoft
PUBLISHER
Take2
DISTRIBUTOR
Take2
PRICE
\$49.95
RATING
G
AVAILABLE
Now

SYSTEM

NEED
MS Flightsim 2002
Duron 750
128Mb RAM
GeForce2 MX
WANT
AthlonXP 1700+
256Mb RAM
500Mb HDD
GeForce3 Ti500

RATING

FOR

- Scenery
- Accurate sim
- Runway 13!

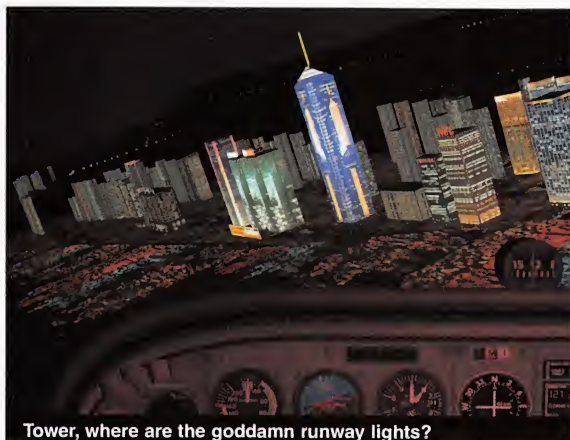
AGAINST

- Limited appeal
- Can't bomb the PLA
- Oops did I say that?

OVERALL

The ultimate simulation of the most exciting airport in civil aviation history

86



Tower, where are the goddamn runway lights?



I found my thrill... on Checkerboard Hill



Is that a volcano in your business district or...?

THE KAI TAK BLOOPERS

Jump on the net and do a search for Kai Tak or head on over to airliners.net and you are bound to find many images of real aircraft scraping paint off engines or clipping wings on the runway while trying to land at Kai Tak airport. The airport was closed in 1998 and was rated as the 3rd busiest passenger airport on the planet and the busiest airport in the world in terms of cargo throughput when it was in full operation.

Ask any aviation buff, pilot or flight simulation enthusiast what they consider to be the most famous and challenging civilian flight approach on the planet and they will quickly give you a story of an airport in Hong Kong where many planes have almost ended up in a watery grave. The airport: Kai Tak.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it: land a fully-loaded 747-400 safely at Kai Tak International Airport, which was widely considered to be the most challenging and one of the most dangerous airline approach paths in aviation history. Sadly, Kai Tak has since been shut down and replaced with the new Chep Lap Kok airport (also included in the package) a few yards down the road which offers a much simpler and far less dangerous approach profile (Sue me, but as an international jetsetter, I ain't weeping - Ed). Fortunately then, you can still enjoy the challenge of the Kai Tak Runway 13 approach with FlightSoft's new title The Ultimate Hong Kong Simulation.

Featuring 'video real' photorealistic texturing and a dense array of 3D

objects and buildings, this add-on scenery title for Microsoft Flight Simulator 2000 and 2002 finally portrays the city of Hong Kong in justifiable detail. The real approach to Kai Tak involved flying only metres above the tops of buildings on finals and making a sharp 60-degree turn to catch the runway right before touchdown. The famous 'checkerboard hill' just north of the airport provided a visual aid to allow the pilot to line up for the fast and dangerous last minute right turn. This same experience is what the developers have attempted to create.

These aviators are crazy

The scenery is very detailed providing a rich density of buildings (all with appropriate texturing and signage), a ton of amphibious watercraft in Victoria Harbour, detailed rendition of Kowloon Peninsular and a solid representation of busy downtown Hong Kong. Night texturing and effects are memorable as building signs and street lighting create an eerie yet exciting ambience around town.

Famous landmarks such as Nathan

Rd, Victoria Peak and the giant sitting Buddha at the Po Lin Monastery on Lantau Island are all present for the 'tourist-type' aviators among us. Replicating the Kai Tak Runway 13 approach is what the product is all about and this add-on does that job very well. The approach profile is marked by a series of steady and strobing lights placed on building rooftops to indicate the approach profile. You need to keep your airspeed right down and set full flaps to make the last turn to final as you approach checkerboard hill. Forget the scenery detail beneath you. Miss the runway and you are in the harbour fishing out odd-smelling boots! Execute a sharp right turn and drop the altitude to hit the touchdown markers in perfect alignment with the runway. It takes a lot of practice. Start with smaller prop aircraft and work your way up. Expect to crash your airplane more than once while learning the ropes.

If you are a fan of this approach or a sim fanatic in general, this title is well worth a look. You will need a beefed up system though as this one eats up frame rates like crazy!

Eastern Thunder

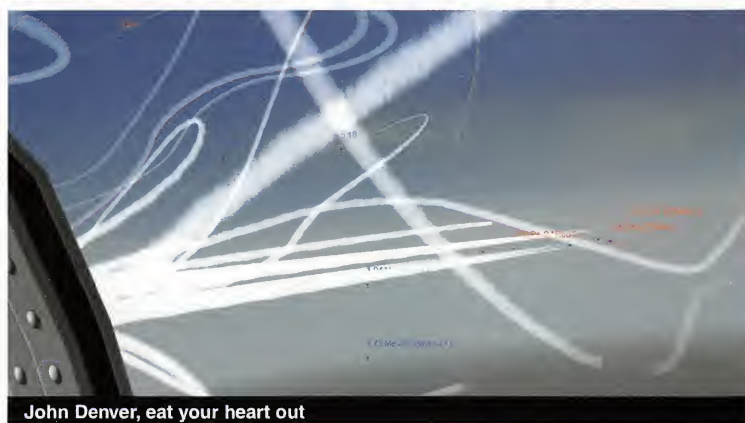
It's an expansion for IL2 Sturmovik, dontcherknow?



I'm leaving on a jet plane...



...don't know when I'll come back again



John Denver, eat your heart out

COVER YOUR SIX!

When flying the IL-2 Sturmovik aircraft itself, you have a rear gunner. In Eastern Thunder missions, it is wise to utilize this asset. By default, if you are flying the aircraft, the computer controls the gunner behind you keeping your tail clear. Basically, the AI gunner is half blind and rarely hits a thing. If you have an enemy fighter on your tail, hit [F1] then [C] on your keyboard to take control of the rear gunner position. The computer will take control of the plane but now you have the ability to fire off some rounds at any fighter trying to hit your from behind.

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Len Hjalmarson
PUBLISHER
Just Flight
DISTRIBUTOR
QV Software
PRICE
\$49.95
RATING
MA15+
AVAILABLE
Now

SYSTEM

NEED

IL-2 Sturmovik,
400Mhz CPU,
128Mb RAM,
16Mb Video Card

WANT

1Ghz CPU,
256Mb RAM,
64Mb GeForce2/3
or ATI Radeon
8500.

RATING

FOR

- Better missions
- Detailed story
- More IL-2!

AGAINST

- No new objects
- No new planes
- Only one campaign

OVERALL

A detailed expansion that cements IL-2 as the best of the WW2 fighter sims

88

Just when you thought IL-2 Sturmovik couldn't get any better, along comes Eastern Thunder from Just Flight. Developed by long time flight simulation enthusiast Len Hjalmarson, Eastern Thunder provides 28 challenging new missions for IL-2. Choose to fly for either the German or the Russians as you battle it out in new scenarios, which can be used as both singleplayer and multiplayer environments. Also included are five new aircraft skins for co-op play. The entire package comprises several mission sets which form a fictional storyline, driven by 'Letters from the Front' which add atmosphere to the saga and campaign. The missions themselves are based very loosely on historical data. However the environment and missions you fly give a realistic representation of what the real WWII fighter pilot may have had to contend with in battle. Most missions are flown at dawn providing an interesting lighting situation for the combat arena, which certainly provides enhanced cover for attacking aircraft and there are

plenty of clouds to weave in and out of if you need to hide from a greater opposing threat.

The real crux of the package lies in the mission design. Len Hjalmarson has gone to great lengths to test-fly each mission over and over to fine-tuning displaced elements and adding depth and immersion to each flight. This is immediately noticeable when you undertake the first few CAPs and ground attack missions. The combat is more intense, the environment less forgiving and the survival rate drops to its knees. This will be no walk in the park even for the most seasoned combat veteran.

Combat seasoning

However you can maximize your chances. Carefully read the pre-flight briefings and take a close look at the reconnaissance photos included on the CD. Having a solid grasp of your mission objectives is likely to boost your chances of survival if you can get in quickly, complete your objectives and get the heck out of there before the enemy backup arrives.

Expect to see more anti-aircraft weapons, enemy fighters and artillery units in Eastern Thunder than in the default IL-2 missions. This of course carries with it a frame rate hit, so crank up your Video Cards or lower the detail settings to ensure performance. A thoughtful feature of the package is the inclusion of 'light' missions. These are designed for users with slower systems and generally include less artillery and fewer enemy aircraft but still maintain the same mission objectives as the 'full' versions. Expect to fly many different and interesting missions including combat air patrols, air-to-ground attacks and general air support for other allied aircraft.

Overall, a very promising add-on for IL-2 Sturmovik if you've already conquered the default missions the combat sim has to offer and are looking for a new challenge.

Dean Bielanowski

H&D Deluxe

Once more into the slightly tweaked breach, my friends

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Lonely Cat Games
PUBLISHER
Take 2
DISTRIBUTOR
Take 2
PRICE
\$69.95
RATING
MA15+
AVAILABLE
Now



Shotgun!



I call this gun the chopper-dropper

SYSTEM

NEED
P3-600
64Mb RAM
32Mb Videocard
500Mb HDD
WANT
Athlon 1GHz
128Mb RAM
64Mb GeForce2
1Gb HDD



Soldiers dying for no reason

DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN

There are a total of 32 missions to play through - 23 from the original plus another 9 taken from a subsequently released mission add-on pack. Bearing in mind that all the missions in the Deluxe version are indistinguishable from their original incarnations (mission objectives and enemy placement are identical), you have to wonder exactly why you would part with your hard-earned gaming dollar for a trip down memory lane, graphical facelift aside. If you've played H&D before, you're better off waiting for the upcoming Hidden & Dangerous 2.

RATING

FOR

- Solid AI
- Environmental effects
- Made for WWII diehards

AGAINST

- Identical to the original
- Clumsy controls
- Limited command system

OVERALL

Decent enough as a stand alone title but falls short of a 'deluxe' version.

65

Hidden & Dangerous Deluxe is part of publisher Take 2's 'Take Advantage' series of re-released classics. The more cynical of you out there will no doubt scoff that the Deluxe tag attached to the game represents nothing but a graphical upgrade, support for Windows 2000 and XP and a few other bits of window dressing. Unfortunately, you would be right.

For those not familiar with the series, HDD is a strategic, squad-based shooter set in various theatres of conflict during WWII. You control a squad of SAS troops assigned to carry out typically sensitive missions behind enemy lines. You can select a total of eight soldiers for each mission, with half deployed at the start of the mission and the other half waiting as ready reserves. Weapons and equipment must be selected and distributed before each mission with orders relayed via a quick briefing and a rather flat terrain flyby.

So what's new?

The original H&D was a game beset by an inordinate number of bugs ranging from interface glitches to soldiers dying for no apparent reason. Thankfully, these

issues have all been addressed in the Deluxe version along with a significant AI upgrade. Problems such as troops not following waypoints or firing at nothing, or enemy soldiers not responding when comrades are engaged, have been eliminated. Despite these improvements, HDD still suffers from a control system that is overly awkward and far from intuitive.

You can choose to play from a first or third person perspective with the latter being the view of choice given the distracting amount of screen space taken up by most of your weapons in first person view. Control of team members is overly simplistic, being limited to simple commands to follow, stop and hold fire. Troops can also be deployed via an overhead tactical map. It would have been nice to have seen some improvement in this area, it being



so crucial in squad-based FPS titles. Multiplayer mode obviously addresses this problem but its worth bearing in mind that, given the age of the title, you may have to rely more on network play than finding a game online.

Running on the new Insanity II 3D engine, HDD looks a treat, even compared to recently released FPS titles. Apart from texture and model upgrades, the light mapping and weather effects in particular deserve special mention. In the sound department, HDD wins points for ambient and environmental effects, but unfortunately nothing has been done to stop your troops from sounding identical.

The state of FPS games is a lot different in 2002 than it was when the original H&D was released, almost two and a half years ago. Features such as strategic squad-based play, different attributes for squad members and one-shot kills which were cutting edge in 1999 are now the norm. At the end of the day, this version of H&D represents the title as it should have been on original release.

Derek Lee

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Obi-Wan



Storyline?

The story of Obi-Wan begins as a prequel to the action in Episode I with Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan being told of the Trade Federation's involvement with the design of anti-force weapons. Eventually the story makes its way to the beginning of the events of Episode I and follows the film closely, except for some reason there is no journey to Coruscant. The action goes from Tatooine straight back to Naboo. Go figure.

Obi-Wan, we need your help. After two years of barely average releases the Lucasarts Empire is close to collapse. Only you can save it from creeping ambivalence. Your Lightsaber and this brown dress are all we can give to aid you. Go quickly Obi-Wan, and don't let the other Jedi call you a sissy boy. And so begins the most dangerous adventure of Obi-Wan's life. Except for that disastrous episode when he got lost trying to find a Wendy's on Coruscant, and that time Mace Windu tricked him into kicking Yoda in the nuts.

Obi-Wan is the game that put so many PC gamers' noses out of joint when they found out it was going exclusively to the Xbox. Sadly their anguish was all rather pointless as you will soon discover. The first thing that hits you in the face when you boot up Obi-Wan is the depressing realisation that it looks like a Nintendo 64 game. Obi-Wan is apparently built out of the original, three year old Jedi Knight engine, which means primitive texture handling and chunky polygons.

Lip service

Game character lips completely fail to sync or move at all for that matter, giving the cut scenes a sort of antique charm not seen in a game since Pong. Is it possible that the Xbox is merely a rebadged Dreamcast? Nah, the Sega Dreamcast had better graphics. Oh well, at least the frame rate stays constant throughout the game.

Once the emotional impact of Obi-Wan's graphical splendor begins to fade you will not be able to help noticing its aural delights. Have you ever heard a bad actor trying to impersonate another bad actor doing an even worse accent? You will, oh yes, you will. Most likely you will not be able to keep a straight



Oops, forgot to go to Coruscant



I hope I get to meet a wookiee one day

Is it possible that the Xbox is merely a rebadged Dreamcast? Nah, the Sega Dreamcast had better graphics.

face long enough to actually swing your Saber around very much, which brings us to what is the only high point of this disappointing title.

Combat in Obi-Wan is actually quite fun. There are a number of ways to wield your Lightsaber, various swoosh types and a throw move that uses it like a boomerang. Your force powers are equally delightful, especially the bits where you get to push bad guys off very high ledges. There's even a Max Payne style time-slow power for those particularly photogenic moves. The combination of Lightsaber,

force powers and standard weapons means that you always have a few tactical options when it comes time to fight. Duck in and out of doorways and snipe your enemies, lure them into a compromising position and give them a little shove, or use Anthony's favored Friday-night-at-the-disco tactic and charge at them with your Saber in hand (You're fired - Ed).

Is your schwartz as big as mine?

The force can also be used to boost your Lightsaber's power to create special, extra effective attacks which can kill



Developer: Lucasarts ■ Publisher: Lucasarts ■ Distributor: Activision ■ Price: \$99.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now



It's the Stay Puft marshmallow man



Stay still so I can kill you

Multiplayer limitations

Jedi Battle is the name given to Obi-Wan's multiplayer side and it's quite self-explanatory. Select two opponents, an arena and fight. You cannot do the super Force Lightsaber attack (the one that takes 2.5 seconds to power up) in multiplayer but all the other powers are available. However there are no setup options or restrictions to allow you to customise the multiplayer game.

Is that droid wearing a cowboy hat?

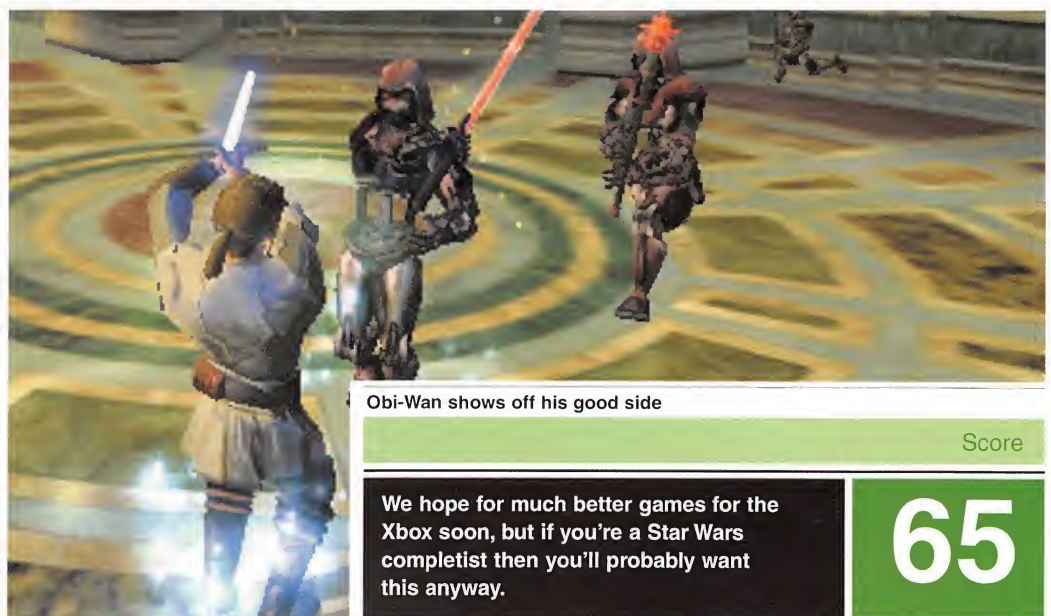
an enemy with a single hit. If you get really pissed off, hold down the Force Power button for two and a half seconds before striking and if your opponent hasn't turned you into a Midichlorean marinade by then, he's toast.

Obi-Wan doesn't have save points like a traditional console title, but it also doesn't let you save wherever you want to. There are restart points to which you will return when you die and five lives per level. When those lives are gone you can no longer use the restart points and have to begin the level again.

If you're looking for the best Jedi gaming experience around at the moment then Jedi Knight 2 on the PC is a far better choice for the discerning gamer. Obi-Wan is great for younger gamers and those who are happy with anything to do with Star Wars but

it's really quite disappointing for the experienced.

George Soropos



Obi-Wan shows off his good side

Score

We hope for much better games for the Xbox soon, but if you're a Star Wars completist then you'll probably want this anyway.

65

F1 2002

Developer: EA Sports ■ Publisher: EA ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

Poor EA Sports. While the Grand Prix gaming world waits patiently for GP4 from the mighty Geoff Crammond, they have to try and sell F1 2002 to the masses. It's not that F1 2002 is a bad game but it is definitely aimed at the freewheeling arcade crowd rather than the sim nut.

All of this year's teams, cars, liveries and drivers are included in the game, a bit of a rarity in F1 titles, as well as this year's circuits. There are the usual options for a quicky race, Grand Prix and multiplayer action but it's what hasn't been included that defines the sort of game F1 2002 really is.

Unlike Microprose's (nee Hasbro) GP series, EA's racing titles use the ubiquitous hovercraft physics model which has fooled so many people over the years. There is no actual contact between car and road in F1 2002, just a pretend sort of contact that is made up of a series of script calls: If this happens then do this, if that happens then do that. The actual physics of contact is not there and the cars feel like they're on ice, even in 'simulation' mode.

Smoke and mirrors??

Another aspect of the game which detracts from the illusion of realism is the lack of a proper in-cockpit view. The closest thing is the TV style over-the-helmet view which isn't really the same thing.

Multiplayer:

The multiplayer side of F1 2002 offers four modes: Time Challenge, Tag Team, Advantage and Last Man Standing. Giving you a lot to muck about with when your mates come over. However the graphics engine just doesn't seem to be able to cut it, as it was initially developed for PC. In split screen the graphics begin to chug very noticeably, and annoyingly.



Hovercrafts on wheels



Not quite the winning formula

EA has introduced one feature that adds a bit of originality to the game in the form of the challenge mode. It is similar to the challenge mode in Infogrames' Lotus Challenge title and poses a series of problems for you to solve. For example you may have to do a lap of a wet Monte Carlo circuit under a given time or do a lap with a pit stop within the time limit.

Game presentation is reasonable although better use could have been made of Xbox audio capabilities and the graphics look a bit dirty at times.

If all you're after is a fun F1 type racing game F1 2002 is a passable effort, but if you want to play with your mates, then you're probably better off waiting for GP4.

Victor Webster



Score

Not a bad title if you're after casual F1 flavoured fun but will disappoint if you're seeking a simulation.

75

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Gunvalkyrie

Developer: Smilebit ■ Publisher: SEGA ■ Distributor: GameNation ■ Price: \$99.95 ■ Rating: M 15+ ■ Available: Now

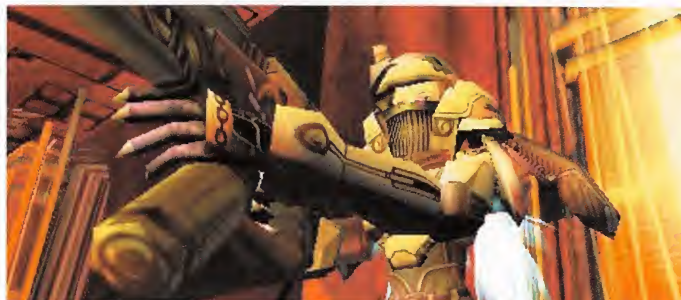
A babe with a gun may not be the newest thing in gaming, but as far as console shooters go, Gunvalkyrie is a bit of an evolution. Players take the role of either a male or female Gunvalkyrie - a shock trooper from an alternate world. Each is equipped with a gun, a grapple, armour and a jetpack and set to do battle with aliens, robots and other nasties which threaten the safety of humanity.

Gunvalkyrie stands out from the crowd due to its fun, twitch style gameplay and highly innovative, if somewhat difficult

to master, control scheme.

Each character is controlled with both thumb-sticks, the right controlling the arms and the left controlling direction while the triggers control jumping and firing. Characters can dash, strafe and fly by clicking the left stick and pushing it in a direction. It takes quite a while to get used to, especially while you're being swamped by monsters, but the ability to zip around the sky for short periods of time like a demented hummingbird truly adds a new dimension to the game.

Daniel Wilks



It's Moops!



Moors!



Score

It may not be a Halo killer, but Gunvalkyrie is an appealing and gorgeous looking game. The controls may not feel intuitive at first but stick with it and reap the rewards.

87

Mad Dash Racing

Developer: Crystal Dynamics ■ Publisher: Eidos Interactive ■ Distributor: Microsoft ■ Price: \$99.95 ■ Rating: PG ■ Available: Now

Racing around a track as one of a number of different amusing fantasy characters may not be everyone's cup of tea but it certainly makes for a frenetic and disarmingly fun way to waste time.

The plot of Mad Dash revolves around some red stones, an evil wizard named Hex and eight foot racers but what it's really about is hooning around huge levels whooping like a maniac and trying not to fall over. Players have the choice of three different styles of character to race with - Bashers who can destroy obstacles, Dashers who can put on sudden

bursts of speed and Gliders who can fly short distances.

Each of the tracks on offer is huge and dotted with obstacles to avoid or overcome, weapons to be used on enemies and secret passages to be found. The graphics are pleasantly cartoony and move smoothly but the soundtrack truly stands out with songs by Moby, Fatboy Slim, The Propellerheads and a number of others. The game comes with both a single and multiplayer mode so should have you running around like an idiot for quite a while.

Daniel Wilks



Run Forrest, run!



There's never a public loo when you need one



Score

A fun single player game and great party game, Mad Dash Racing plays like a cross between a platformer and a racer - and that's not a bad thing at all.

83

Pirates

Developer: Westwood ■ Publisher: EA ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$99.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

Right from the first frame it becomes obvious that Pirates has followed the Tomb Raider method to deliver a heroine with an impressively cantilevered treasure chest and an abundance of booty (You're fired - Ed).

Cast in the role of Katerina de Leon, the Black Kat of the title, the player is charged with the task of plundering the high seas, avenging Kat's father's murder and amassing a fortune by nefarious but determinedly sexy means. The game consists of two modes - a land based, third

person adventure game which sees Katerina running and jumping around, finding buried treasure and offing various of enemies, and a sea-based naval combat mode. Though this may sound quite fun, neither mode works particularly well. In the adventure portion of the title most of the enemies are far too similar and can be destroyed easily with a quick mash of the game pad. Naval combat is too slow to be much fun. A good pirate game could be beautiful but Black Kat is only adequate.

Daniel Wilks



The bastard offspring of Lara Croft and Bluebeard



Arr, that's a fine merchant vessel to plunder



Score

A comely and buxom pirate is nothing to be sneezed at but Pirates: Legend of the Black Kat needs more varied gameplay to hold interest for any longer than a few hours.

78

Ricky Carmichael MX 2002

Developer: Pacific Coast Power & Light ■ Publisher: THQ ■ Distributor: THQ ■ Price: \$99.95 ■ Rating: PG ■ Available: Now

Massive air, well-designed tracks and well-animated riders form the core of the newest game in the ever-popular field of motocross, MX 2002. Putting more emphasis on racing than tricks (although they do play a part) MX 2002 allows the player to create a rider or use one of the pre-defined riders and set them against each other in a number of races and trick events.

The control system is very simple to grasp: left thumb-stick or D-pad for control, A button for acceleration, B for brake, left trigger to feather the choke for

boosts of speed and right trigger to pre-load the suspension for higher and longer jumps. All the tracks are well designed and have a fantastic flow to them. Unfortunately a few flaws detract from the game overall, namely the lack of any real feeling of speed and the fact that the game is far more lenient on AI riders when it comes to landing jumps than it is on the player. The game supports both single and multiplayer mode with game styles ranging from straight races to trick competitions.

Daniel Wilks



The Superman seat grab



This looks like a good place to get off



Score

A few flaws stop MX 2002 from being great but the amount of single and multiplayer gameplay to be had definitely makes it a worthwhile purchase for racing fans.

82

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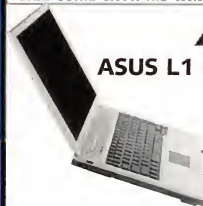
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IN REVIEW

Stuff you need to make your box the Beast

HARDWARE

Welcome all to this month's Hardware section where we initially see the return of ... me. Hi, my name is Jere Lawrence and for those that don't remember, I was Tech Editor of PC PowerPlay from issues 1 - 38. That was until a serious illness stole two and a half years of my life. Back and with renewed vigour I once again find myself at the helm of PCPP Hardware and aim to bring you, our valued readers, all the tech news, features and comprehensive round-ups that you've come to expect from the highly competent PCPP Hardware team.

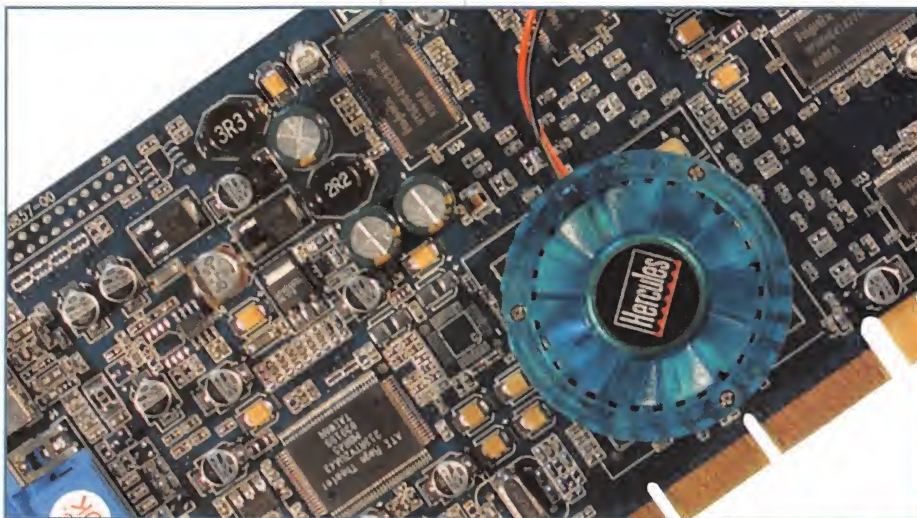
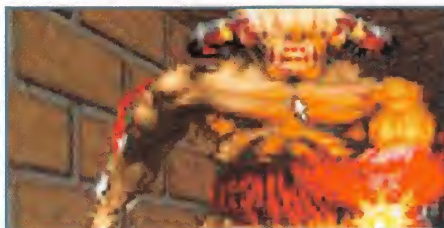
But enough of me, this month sees a new Setup format where uber tech-guru Stuart Calvin answers your questions with the kind of detail that well, only an uber tech-guru could. His feature article which discusses everything anyone could possibly want to know about digital connectivity and S/PDIF is a must read for both audiophiles and novices alike. Stuart also puts two 40 speed CD Burners through rigorous testing with an attention to detail second to none.

Asher Moses our motherboard aficionado takes a detailed look at the Abit AT7 KT-333 motherboard and is suitably impressed. We also review the latest gamepads, continue our analysis of LCD flat screen digital monitors and sample the latest stereographic technology with the Direct2U 3D Gaming glasses.

Another new form of hardware to appear on our pages, the APC UPS ES 350 finally brings the practicality of an uninterruptible power supply to the consumer.

Finally this month's Hardware feature story takes a look at the history of 3D acceleration with all the highs and lows of the video card industries battle for market dominance and "The Beast" is once again tweaked ensuring that our silicon monstrosity remains as desirable as ever. Until next month, enjoy.

Jere Lawrence
Deputy Editor
Jerel@next.com.au



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THE PCPP HARDWARE RATINGS SYSTEM

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| 80-89 | Worthy product, which is hard to fault. May be slightly lacking in extra features, value or performance. |
| 60-79 | Competent product, significantly behind the State of the Art. |
| 40-59 | Mediocre with little to recommend it. |
| 0-39 | A dog. Avoid. |
| Distributor | The local point of contact for the product. |
| Price | The RRP at the time of going to print. |
| URL | Where to find further relevant information. |

THE HISTORY OF 3D ACCELERATORS

Games have changed dramatically over the last few years and one device has contributed to this change more than any other piece of hardware in the history of computing. That device is the 3D accelerator and its inception brought new levels of colour, rendering speed and visual effects to our PCs that surpassed even arcade games. Whether you missed it the first time around or simply want to reminisce, join with us and celebrate the glory that is 3D as we take you through the history of 3D accelerators.

1996

Matrox MGA64 – PCPP#8

Leading the charge was the Matrox Mystique, a 3D accelerator that promised the kind of high performance that Matrox was renowned for in desktop and business circles. The Mystique however did not really capture the 3D market because of its lack of visually enhancing 3D functions. Although the MGA64 chipset found on the card featured 4MB of memory, true perspective texture mapping, gouraud shading, texture transparency, double buffering and Z-buffering, there was no support for MIP mapping or bilinear filtering. This meant that although the card could increase the frame rate of a game, the visual quality remained essentially the same. There were other problems too. The Mystique offered very little support for

DirectX and thus Direct3D. Instead the card relied on developers programming the chipset directly. Unfortunately for Matrox only four developers actually produced titles compatible with the MGA64. They were Mechwarrior 2, Destruction Derby 2, Scorched Planet and Thunder Truck.

S3 Virge – PCPP#8

One of the more important distinctions to make on a 3D accelerator is the difference between chipset and card manufacturer. To use a modern day example, nVIDIA is currently the number one graphics chipset manufacturer with the GeForce 3 and GeForce 4 products. NVIDIA however doesn't produce any video cards at all. Instead, companies such as MSI and Asus buy the chipset, memory and heatsink/fan and incorporate it onto their own printed circuit board (PCB). This is the case with S3 who developed the Virge chipset, which a company like Hercules incorporated into its Terminator S3 series. Featuring 2MB of memory, MIP mapping, bilinear and trilinear filtering, depth cueing, fogging, alpha blending and Z-buffering, the Virge was visually comparable to the Rendition V1000 but unfortunately ran at only 1/3 the speed. However, where the Virge

chipset was really strong, was its price. Considerably cheaper than the competition, cards with the Virge chipset found their way into a lot of OEM PCs and served those on a tight budget well.

Rendition V1000 – PCPP#8

The Creative 3D Blaster, the first to incorporate the V1000 chipset, was a big hit and performed exceptionally when compared to its competition at the time. Featuring 4MB of memory, perspective correct texture mapping, bilinear filtering, MIP mapping, hardware Z-buffering, anti-aliasing and a RISC core, the V1000 was visually spectacular and completely Direct3D compatible. Running at a resolution of 640 x 480 x 16-bit (65,000 colours) the V1000 could achieve Quake frame rates greater than 55 fps, a level of performance that was previously unheard of. To compare, non-accelerated Quake ran at 11 fps on the same system.

The V1000 had its problems though. The card, not compatible with a BIOS function called VGA palette snooping, required users to configure their BIOS before they could even properly start their machines. DOS support was also incredibly poor with abysmal frame rates where even text

scrolled much slower than lesser video cards.

1997

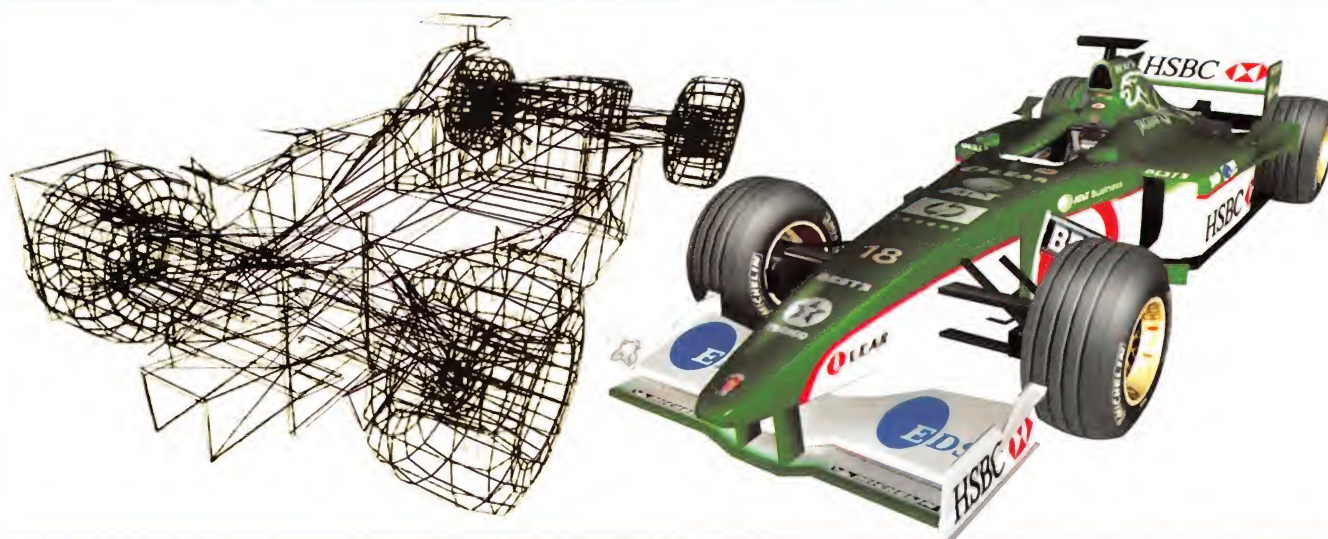
3Dfx Voodoo1 – PCPP#10

With the arrival of the Voodoo1, Rendition lost the spotlight as rapidly as it had risen to fame. 3Dfx had burst onto the scene and upstaged everyone with the show stopping performance of the Voodoo1.

Arriving only 2 months after the V1000 the 3Dfx Voodoo1 chipset was the first 3D accelerator to capture the market. The graphics the Voodoo1 produced were better than anything the gaming community had seen - ever.

With perspective correct texturing, level of detail (LOD) MIP mapping, bilinear filtering, texture compositing and morphing, animated texturing, anti-aliasing, gouraud modulation, sub pixel correction, per pixel alpha blending, translucency, transparency 24-bit texturing and 4MB of memory the feature set was astounding. Such abilities allowed the Voodoo1 to capably render every function that DirectX 2 and 3 could offer. No strange artefacts, no crazy solid square blocks that should have been transparent - just perfect rendering. Not only did





Ever wondered what your computer thinks is under the bonnet?

the Voodoo1 produce incredible images but it also outperformed every other card on the market. Even the two-month-old Rendition cards seemed dated in looks and performance.

DirectX wasn't the only Application Programming Interface (API) the Voodoo1 supported either. Glide was 3Dfx's own proprietary language that performed faster than DirectX 2 and 3. Unlike OpenGL however, Glide wasn't an open API but proprietary to 3Dfx products. Instead of Glide being used as an enhancing option, 3Dfx pushed hard to enlist developers' sole support. Some did, some stayed with DirectX and others supported both APIs. Players who couldn't afford a Voodoo1 suddenly found themselves isolated from certain titles.

3Dfx also adopted a different design philosophy with its 3D accelerator. The Voodoo1 wasn't a stand alone Video Card but existed for one purpose - to render, and only render 3D graphics. Instead of replacing your current video card it was a separate entity in its own PCI slot. By using a 15-pin VGA passthrough connector the Voodoo1 would sit idly until a Direct3D call awoke it to render whatever game was being played. This design offered the advantage of allowing you to use a fast Video Card for 2D

operations but also meant that the Voodoo1 could not render 3D in a window. No one really cared though. 3Dfx had taken us to the next level in 3D graphics and record sales confirmed its position as the leader of 3D.

NEC PowerVR – PCPP#10

Being in the unfortunate position of releasing its product at the same time as 3Dfx the PowerVR never really made the impact it deserved on the market. With only bare bones support for DirectX, the PowerVR increased frame rate dramatically but, without any form of bilinear filtering, suffered from poor image quality.

Other DirectX problems emerged from the card's inability to render transparent textures. In DirectX games any kind of object like a window would appear as a big white square instead. But there was another, more potent side to the PowerVR. Like 3Dfx, NEC had decided the best API was its own and released PowerSGL, a custom rendering engine. Not being designed around the DirectX principle of taking low-res textures and smoothing them with bilinear or trilinear filtering, the PowerVR was the first 3D accelerator that allowed a maximum texture size of 256 x 256 - four times larger than the Voodoo1's maximum texture size of 64 x 64. It was one game however among a handful of PowerSGL titles that

showed the true power and graphical quality of this card - Ultimate Race. It was the first truly arcade experience for the PC and despite transparent texturing and bilinear filtering, Ultimate Race showed what could be achieved with large clear textures. Objects such as cars and buildings had a level of sharpness that made the 3Dfx seem blurry. Other unique enhancements the PowerVR offered was with real time lighting. All objects could cast shadows calculated in hardware as well as complex lighting effects. With a similar render rate to the Voodoo1 the PowerVR showed what could be achieved when programmed its way. Unfortunately for NEC, programmers weren't prepared to develop for a custom API that excluded the majority of the DirectX capable market.

Voodoo Rush – PCPP#12

Considered 3Dfx's first real failure, the Voodoo Rush was an

attempt to create a Voodoo Card that incorporated a 2D and 3D solution. Poorly implementing these two functions the Rush used an Alliance Semiconductor 2D component and a Voodoo1. The result was a device that suffered from poor 2D image quality and performance. Even 3D performance was 10% slower than that of a Voodoo1. In fact, the only advantage the Rush brought was the ability to render 3D in a window, a function most gamers didn't even need.

ATi Rage Pro – PCPP#13

Having attained market dominance in the early nineties with the Mach range of products, ATi was not about to sit idly and let a bunch of upstart companies steal its market. ATi responded with the Rage Pro and offered an AGP as well as a PCI version of the card. Its features included texture decompression, anti-aliasing and bilinear/trilinear filtering. Image quality however was only average and the



performance didn't match that of the Voodoo1. With a competent feature set, the Rage Pro sold and through old alliances found its way into many OEM machines.

NEC PCX3 – PCPP#15

With the tragic but predictable failure of the PowerVR, Videologic, the distributor for NEC in the west was now out of the picture. This time Matrox adopted a chipset to replace the poorly received MGA64 and they chose the PCX3. The next revision to the PowerVR, the PCX3 still did not feature transparency/translucency. Here was a second-generation product that was still inferior to a first generation one. It did however incorporate all the functions of the original plus those it was criticised for lacking such as bilinear filtering and MIP mapping. But the new features came at a price. The PCX2 wasn't a complete redesign, but instead had its extra functionality "tacked on". Where the PowerVR had been comparable to the performance of a Voodoo1, the PCX2 was only half the speed. NEC knowing that it had lost the 3D PC market, made a deal with Sega. The PCX2 would be re-badged as the PVR250 and live on in the form of the Sega Dreamcast.

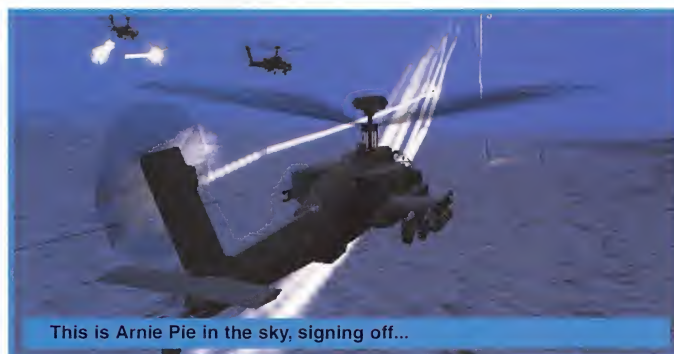
NVIDIA Riva 128 NV3 – PCPP#19

So far no one had been able to shift 3Dfx, the seemingly unmovable force in 3D performance. That was until nVIDIA returned to the scene. nVIDIA weren't the new arrival many thought; it had just been very quiet after the terrible failure of its first chipset the NV1. Completed in 1995 before the arrival of Direct3D, the NV1 used proprietary quadratic texture

mapping. This unfortunately was contrary to the standard primitive that Microsoft had chosen - polygons. In only two short months and after years of development the NV1 was incompatible with the new 3D rendering standard and was forced to retreat from public interest as well as lay off several employees.

Back to 1997 nVIDIA's return gave a taste of things to come. This highly capable company had

with its V2100 and V2200 chipset. Twice as fast as the Voodoo1 and with the same image quality as the V1000, the V2X00 was also considerably cheaper than the Voodoo and incorporated a 2D and 3D solution. The differences between the 2100 and 2200 were only minor. The 2200 was the same speed as the 2100 but could receive a daughter-board that offered hardware assistance for the playback of MPEG-2 DVD



This is Arnie Pie in the sky, signing off...

been the first to produce a product that could out-benchmark a 3Dfx. Not only was the NV3 faster but it combined 2D/3D capability and could run at a resolution of 800 x 600 whereas the Voodoo1 could only render at 640 x 480.

The Riva 128 was not without its failings though. Its image quality was inferior to that of the Voodoo1. This often meant that images had an annoying graininess to them. Where the Voodoo1 produced crystal clear translucent effects, the Riva 128 obscured the effect with dithering causing scattered black pixels to appear in areas. 3Dfx was still number one.

1998

Rendition V2X00 – PCPP#20

Not about to sit idly, Rendition challenged the 3Dfx stranglehold

movies. Similar problems to the V1000 were still apparent though with the V2X00 offering appalling DOS performance and it was still not compatible with VGA palette snooping. Once again Rendition would retain its lead for only a short time. The release of the Voodoo2 was only months away and already well hyped by 3Dfx marketing. After the release of the Voodoo2, Rendition's sales would not be able to keep the company from slowly slipping away into obscurity.

3Dfx Voodoo2 – PCPP#24/25/26

With competing technology nipping at 3Dfx's heels, it was time to hit back. The sequentially named Voodoo2 was the new star of the 3Dfx family. With the same feature set as the Voodoo1 it also offered trilinear filtering, bump

mapping, depth buffering, sub pixel/sub texel correction, alpha blending and single pass multi-texturing. Once again 3Dfx had shot back into the lead and with a clever ability known as SLI ensured that it would stay there. SLI stood for scan line interleaving and allowed two PCI Voodoo2s to coexist in the same machine and share the burden of rendering the scene. The way it worked was one card would render all the odd scan lines (1,3,5,7,9 etc) and the other card would render all the even (2,4,6,8,10 etc) lines. It worked perfectly and not only was it the only implementation of its type but offered users affordable scalability. Another controversial feature of the Voodoo2 was single pass multi-texturing that nVIDIA claimed was technology it had already patented. In mid 2000 nVIDIA successfully sued 3Dfx, receiving millions in compensation.

Intel i740 – PCPP#27

The i740's emergence into the world of 3D acceleration in typical Intel style was marketed with a lot of hype, which it failed to live up to. Being one of the first AGP cards, Intel was banking on buyers eager for new technology over substance. That isn't to say there was anything wrong with the i740, just that it performed at only half the speed of a Voodoo2 and only barely faster than a Voodoo1, despite AGP2X. To the i740's credit though, it did manage to match the image quality of a Voodoo2. Considering the money and resources at Intel's disposal, one can only assume that the i740 was specifically developed for a low price as opposed to high performance.

NVIDIA Riva TNT – PCPP#29/30

The next incarnation of the Riva series the TNT was designed to specifically take 3Dfx head on. An AGP2X device, the TNT featured even more advanced image functions than the Voodoo2 such as alpha blending, full screen anti-aliasing, anisotropic filtering and single pass multi-texturing.



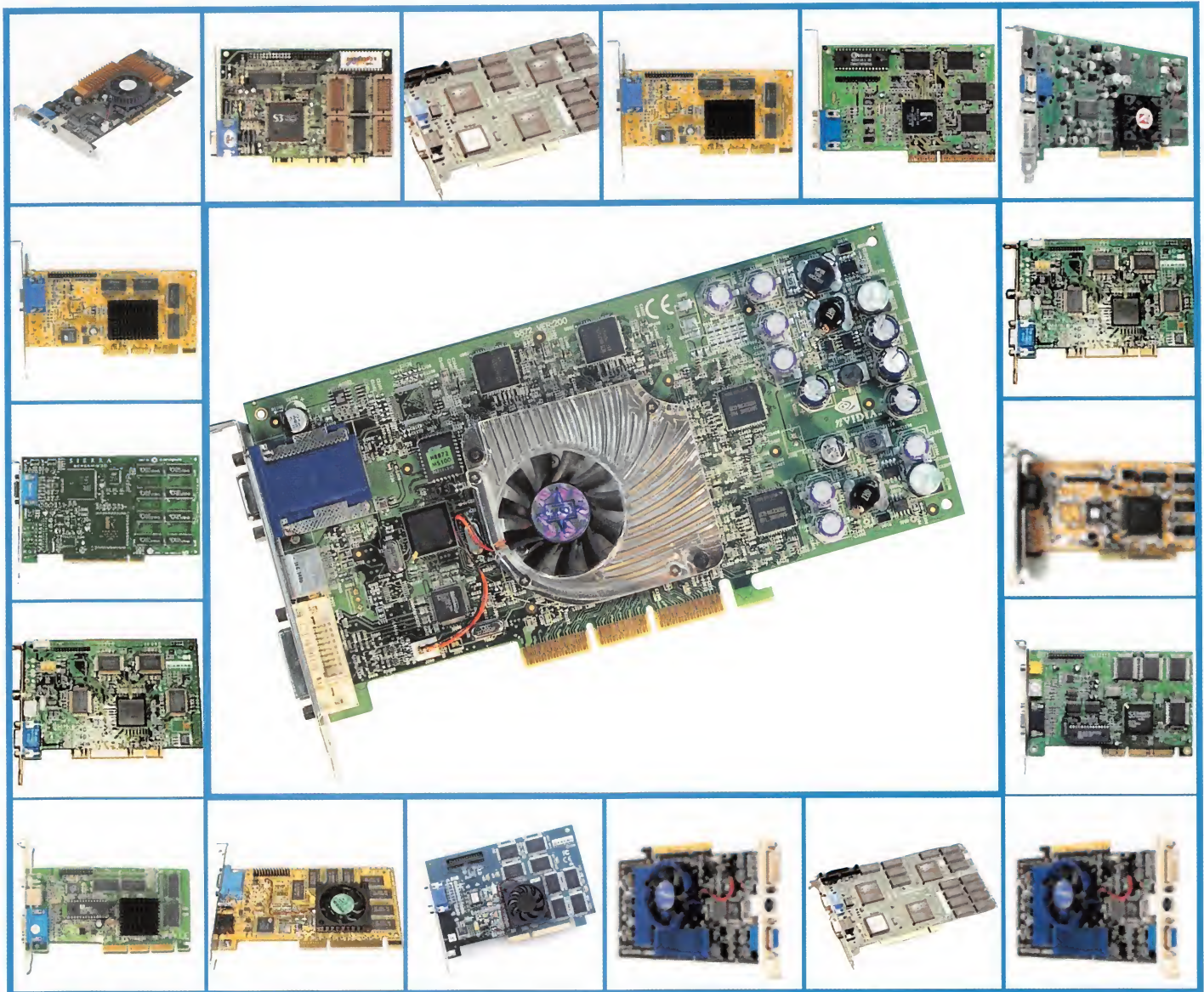
The doomed generation



Adidasotropic filtering



No clothes? How pervy.



Essentially as fast as a single Voodoo2, the TNT was a 2D/3D processor that could render up to 32-bit colour, twice the bit depth of 3Dfx's 16-bit palette. SLI however saved 3Dfx from an early extinction. Two Voodoo2s in SLI were still the fastest accelerator in town. NVIDIA however now had a foot in the door and 3Dfx was losing market share because of them.

S3 Savage 3D – PCPP#30/32

NVIDIA wasn't the only company to have laboured hard to produce a competitive product in a relatively short time. S3 was the next to confront 3Dfx with a comparable offering to the Voodoo2. Unlike S3's previous Virge offering, the Savage 3D matched the performance of the Voodoo2 as well as maintaining

similar image quality, even when running in its much hyped texture compression mode. Texture compression allowed the S3 card to use less memory when painting a scene by compressing the textures stored in on-board memory. This allowed the S3D to fit more textures in the same amount of memory as a Voodoo2 and also to render at higher resolutions - up to 1280 x 1024. As a single card solution with excellent 2D performance, it was only SLI that kept 3Dfx in the lead.

3dfx Voodoo Banshee – PCPP#30

Once again 3Dfx was determined to release a competitive 2D/3D solution but the Voodoo Banshee wasn't it. Like the Voodoo Rush, the Banshee still didn't perform as well as the PCI Voodoo2.

Although 2D performance was significantly boosted, the Banshee lacked the Texel Management Unit (TMU) of the Voodoo2. This meant it couldn't do single pass multi-texturing and allowed the Riva TNT to significantly outperform it at higher resolutions. Running at only AGP1X, the lack of 2X support also placed the Banshee behind the competition who could match Voodoo2 performance and support sideband addressing.

1999

3dfx Voodoo3 – PCPP#33/38

With a new market strategy came a new name. 3dfx (formerly 3Dfx) was now in the middle of developing its 3rd generation chipset while at the same time securing the purchase of STB,

makers of 2D video solutions. The result was a card that arrived six months too late and at the same time 3dfx's main competitor NVIDIA released its third generation solution. 3dfx however was in more trouble than many could have expected. The Voodoo3 received lots of criticism for being nothing more than two Voodoo2s in SLI mode with a doubled clock core. This gave the Voodoo3 awesome performance but a feature set one generation behind. In particular, the Voodoo3s only offered AGP1X like the Banshee and still excluded sideband addressing from its function list. This, plus the support of only 16-bit colour when all 3rd generation competition offered 32-bit colour, hurt the company considerably. 3dfx argued incessantly that in

games moving at faster than 30 fps you couldn't even tell the difference between 16 and 32-bit colour - but they were wrong. In just one set of tests offered by 3D Mark, the difference between 65,536 colours (16-bit) and 4,294,967,296 colours (32-bit) could easily be seen in a simple graduation between two points. This technique, particularly important in alpha blending and gouraud shading, made the Voodoo3 look like a second rate contender rather than the market leader it had once been.

Glide had also become a casualty. With the release of DirectX 6, Glide was no longer providing better performance and developer support was drying up. DirectX had become a viable development API and with the lessening market share of 3dfx, gamecos were looking more for across-the-board compatibility, rather than trying to please just one company. Suddenly the Voodoo3 range offered no advantages over the competition and indeed, with a reduced colour palette, was at a distinct disadvantage.

NVIDIA Riva TNT 2 – PCPP#38

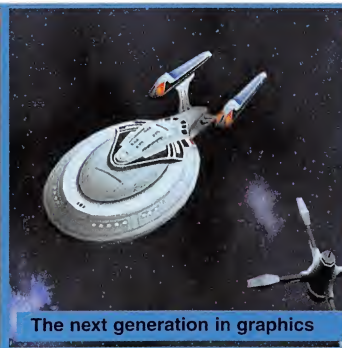
The Riva TNT2 was the product to finally unseat 3dfx as the leader of 3D acceleration. It could be argued that the war between 3dfx and nVIDIA was essentially about speed vs quality. To the credit of the Voodoo3, it did manage to out-benchmark the TNT2 in the majority of tests but this was only in 16-bit colour. To nVIDIA's credit the TNT2 could process double the amount of pixel-data at 32-bit but suffered only very little performance loss when compared to 16-bit performance.



With 32MB of memory, 32-bit colour, a 32-bit frame buffer, 32-bit stencil buffer and a 32-bit Z-buffer, the TNT2 was 32-bit crazy – and the feature set paid off. It gave developers a larger colour palette to work with and with more memory, a larger texture set. This is really where the TNT2 could outperform the Voodoo3. In just one 16MB texture rendering test where the TNT2 achieved 89.5 fps, the Voodoo3 clocked in a paltry 4.7 fps. Larger textures too meant better quality imaging in games. The TNT2 could paint scenes with high definition, ultra sharp 2048 x 2048 x 32-bit textures with which the Voodoo3 couldn't compete, having only 256 x 256 x 16-bit textures. NVIDIA had finally done it. Four years after its initial failure it had managed to claw its way to number 1 and even the most ardent of Voodoo devotees admitted 3dfx had finally been beat.

S3 Savage 4 – PCPP#38

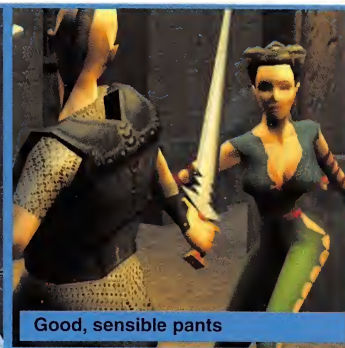
S3, once a large organisation with vast OEM support, was now struggling. The Savage S3, despite being a worthy opponent to the Voodoo2, hadn't sold in the numbers needed to restore once healthy S3 sales. The Savage 4 was S3's response to the 3rd generation 3D



accelerator. With single-pass multi-texturing, 32-bit colour, sprite and full screen anti-aliasing (FSAA), texture compression, and anisotropic filtering, the Savage 4 was feature rich but performance poor. Up to 250% slower than a TNT2 or Voodoo3 in some tests, the Savage 4 did not manage to entice a market that was hungry for power. The second casualty after Rendition, the once prolific company of S3 would not make it to the end of 2000.

NVIDIA GeForce 256 – PCPP#42/ 44

NVIDIA, having clawed its way to number one, was not about to let the competition catch it unaware or unprepared. The GeForce 256 released only months after the TNT2 brought next generation 3D acceleration early. With four pixel pipelines (twice the amount of a TNT2), the GeForce 256 could double the render rate of its predecessor yet at the same clock speed. This achievement however was secondary to newer functionality the GeForce contained. Hardware transformation and lighting (T&L or TnL) elevated the 3D accelerator into a fully featured graphical processing unit (GPU). The one-chip T&L GPU took pressure away from the CPU by performing transformation and lighting calculations in the Video Card's hardware. Still a highly desirable addition to today's cards, the GPU frees up the CPU from the burden of calculating geometry and allows more CPU time for the processing of physics, AI and other important algorithms used in games.

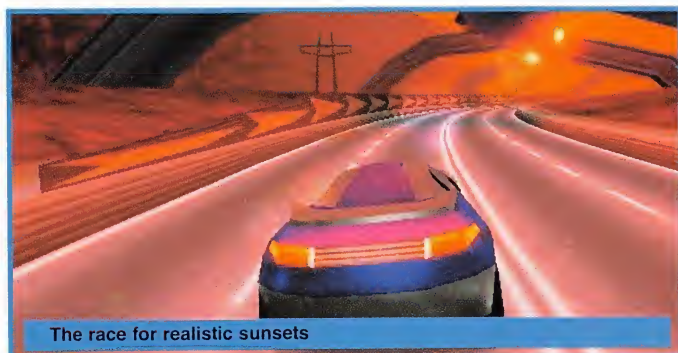


3dfx Voodoo 4/5 – PCPP#45

(Voodoo 4 4500, Voodoo5 5000/5500/6000)

Considered 3dfx's last stand, the Voodoo4/5 range was an all or nothing attempt to produce the fastest card at all costs. Technically speaking, 3dfx was working to incorporate the kind of functionality in the Voodoo4/5 that, like the initial Voodoo1, would place them technologically ahead of the competition. Learning from the mistakes of the Voodoo3, 3dfx ensured that the Voodoo 5 had a fully 32-bit colour palette, AGP4X support plus all new functionality. VSA-100 (Voodoo Scalable Architecture) was everything 3dfx had learnt about SLI and incorporated as a single chip solution. Multiple VSA-100 chips (or Voodoo cores) could be incorporated onto an AGP card and work together to process a 3D scene. Up to 32 VSA-100 chips could work together on a single card and address up to 2GB of RAM. 3dfx's T-buffer was the next addition to the Voodoo 4/5 and promised advanced 3D effects such as motion blurring, depth of field, soft reflections and soft shadows. All this new technology however could not offset common bad luck.

Unfortunately for 3dfx, the memory hungry Voodoo5 series coincided with a massive memory price rise in 1999 and to make matters worse the modularity of VSA led to instability problems. The result was a very expensive accelerator that was initially recalled and not re-released until June of 2000 - seven months later. All these problems amounted to the demise of 3dfx



who, on the 15th December 2000, gave up the ghost and was absorbed by the now very wealthy nVIDIA. 3dfx, we here at PCPP salute you and remain grateful for the revolution in gaming you started. RIP.

2000

ATi Radeon – PCPP#53

Although 98/99 saw the release of new ATi products, they were all only upgrades and clock-speed increases to the Rage 128. The gaming market wasn't particularly hungry for ATi accelerators and yet that same market was relatively irrelevant. Years in the business gave ATi an OEM customer base large enough that it could sit back and remain fiscally viable whilst the other companies fought it out. By mid-2000 the accelerator wars had seen the demise of Rendition, 3dfx, S3 and Matrox. It was now between ATi and nVIDIA and with the release of the Radeon, ATi had used nVIDIA's own tactics against them by trumping the GeForce 256. Also featuring T&L, in 16-bit tests the Radeon performed equally to the GeForce 256 but its 32-bit performance was 40% faster. This was due to ATi's proprietary technology called HyperZ, which allowed the Radeon to better calculate hidden surfaces, compress Z-data buffer read and writes, and clear the Z-buffer much faster than the competition.

NVIDIA GeForce2 GTS – PCPP#53

NVIDIA, being the masters of competition brand destroying tactics they are, was to release the GeForce2 only 48 hours after the Radeon. Once again nVIDIA had effectively harmed its competition with precision timing on a product release. With a similar feature set to the GeForce 256, the GeForce2 GTS (giga texel shader) included T&L optimisations and could process one billion filtered textured pixels per second (thus the giga reference). Three times the performance of the GeForce 256 the inclusion of a per-pixel

shading and lighting engine also placed the GeForce2 well ahead of the competition with the ability to apply advanced lighting effects on a pixel-by-pixel basis. The beginnings of nVIDIA's nfiniteFX direct hardware programming engine, per-pixel and vertex shading, is 3D accelerator functionality so ahead of its time that effective usage won't be seen until titles like Everquest II are released in December of 2003.

2001

NVIDIA GeForce3 – PCPP#61

NVIDIA, still driven to completely dominate the accelerator market continued its relentless assault with the release of the GeForce3. 30% faster than a GeForce2 Ultra, the GeForce3 didn't necessarily double its predecessor's performance but instead brought advanced functionality to 3D accelerators. The nfiniteFX engine was more than an advanced pixel and vertex shader, it allowed developers to directly program the graphics chip. New features such as bump-mapping were no longer restricted to compatible APIs but should the developer want to they could directly code their own implementation. NfiniteFX functionality also meant that nVIDIA itself could easily implement new functionality through software drivers. For example if a new digital effect such as motion blurring was released in the next version of DirectX then nVIDIA need only supply new drivers that explain to the nfiniteFX engine how to render the effect. Not only does this technology allow for hardware implementation of a software procedure but places the focus of development on core and memory



speed rather than trying to constantly add new functionality.

ATi Radeon 8500 – PCPP#73

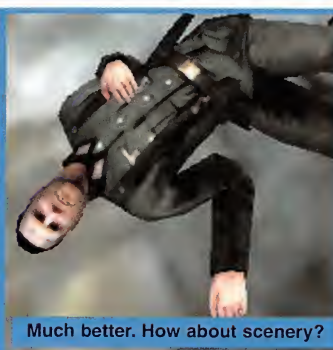
ATi now found itself having to play catch-up to nVIDIA like the beleaguered 3dfx company before it. The result was the Radeon 8500 that not only outperformed the GeForce2 but could also outperform the GeForce3 by a factor of 20%. For the first time since the accelerator wars began ATi had successfully out-benchmarked nVIDIA. Another aspect ATi cleverly marketed was that where the GeForce3 was only compatible with DirectX 8.0, the Radeon 7X00-8X00 was completely compatible with DirectX 8.1. With its long-time OEM support and alliances, ATi was also to cater to a home market that bought its PCs whole. Appealing to a market segment that does more than just play games, the Radeon supported hardware operations such as video input and capture, output to TV, hardware DVD playback and 2 IEEE 1394 FireWire ports for the connection of digital video and digital camera devices.

2002

NVIDIA GeForce 4 – PCPP#73

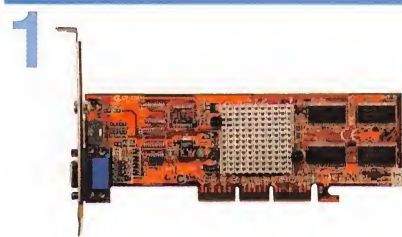
If it wasn't obvious by now, nVIDIA had a savage addiction to being number one and losing to the Radeon 8500 was a sore point. The result was the GeForce4 which offered across-the-board performance increases and was 40% faster than the Radeon 8500. The way nVIDIA achieved this was with much faster clock speeds than the GeForce3 and the introduction of new technology. NfiniteFX II, with dual vertex and pixel shaders, allows the GeForce4 to perform nfiniteFX functions 50% faster than a GeForce3. LMA II is an advanced form of ATi's HyperZ technology and features lossless Z-buffer compression, Z-occlusion optimisations, fast Z-clearing and a crossbar-based memory controller that allowed for all memory requests to be handled properly. LMA II ultimately delivers four times the memory performance, even at high processing loads. DirectX 8.1 compatibility was also included and with this addition it was complete. nVIDIA had once again retaken the lead and only time will tell what the future brings next.

Jere Lawrence



ATI POWERTEST

Gigabyte
Radeon 7000 Pro Maya AV

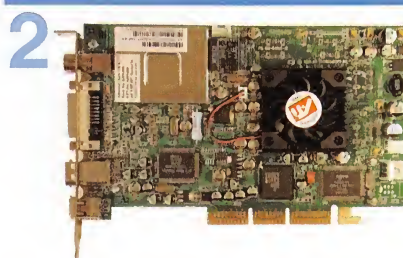


Until only a couple of years ago, Gigabyte was a fairly unexciting OEM manufacturer specialising in motherboards. More recently it has been developing its own brand and earning some respect in the community. The AMD761-based GA-7DXR for example was regarded as one of the best motherboards based on that chipset. They were one of the first companies to start producing Video Cards using ATI chipsets.

This particular card is based on the Radeon 7000E graphics processor at 155MHz with 64MB of SDR memory also running at 155MHz. This marks it pretty clearly as a 'value' card and unfortunately the benchmarks point that way too. This card seriously lagged in the high-resolution tests - the 1600 x 1200 Q3 test taking an agonizing 46 minutes to complete! TV-out ports for both RCA composite and S-Video are present on the backplate, but no cables are provided. No GPU fan or memory heatsinks are required to keep this tiny red card cool. A full copy of Serious Sam: The First Encounter is a nice inclusion, along with PowerDVD, a driver/utility CD and a demo of 4x4 Evolution.

A very cheap card but noticeably slower than even a GF2 MX400 and difficult to recommend.

Hercules
3D Prophet All-In-Wonder Radeon 8500DV



The All-In-Wonder range is ATI's offering to the video-enthusiast market and has been very well received. Covered in some depth in PCPP#73, this Hercules 8500DV-based variant is bristling with connectors for hooking up video devices for both input and output. The FireWire ports can connect to a range of devices including external hard drives, MP3 players etc. You can plug your TV antenna into the card and watch normal or cable TV on your PC, with the ability to rewind back through TV you've seen to catch the good bits again. You can capture video at up to 25fps in 720 x 576 from the inputs, be that TV or video in from a camera, VCR, Laserdisc player etc. You can also output to TV, projector or various recording devices. There's even a RF wireless remote control to complete your home-theatre PC.

This card's features make it less gamer-oriented than the other 8500 cards. The Radeon 8500DV chipset that powers it is a lower-clocked version of the normal 8500, but is otherwise identical. The graphics core runs at 230MHz core speed and the 64MB of DDR SDRAM onboard runs at 380MHz (190MHz DDR). In the benchmarks it fares well but doesn't lead the pack - but in terms of features it blows the others away.

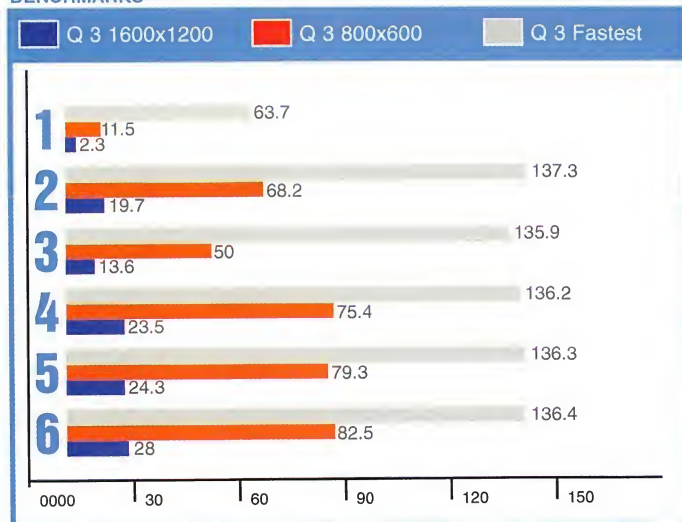
Hercules
3D Prophet All-In-Wonder Radeon 7500



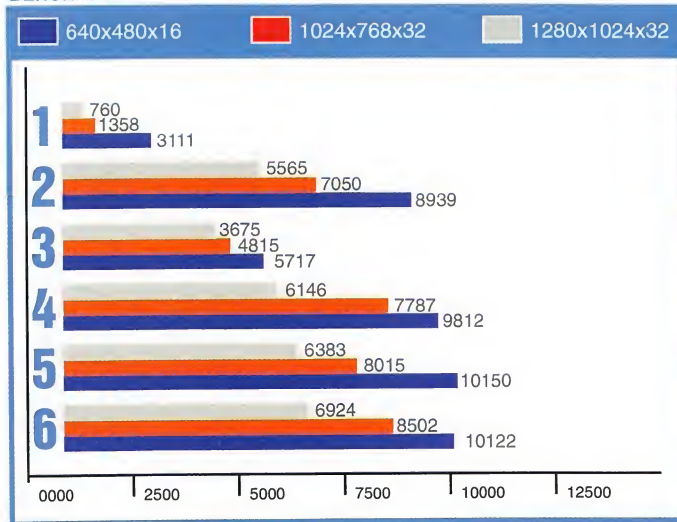
The little brother of the 8500 version, this All-In-Wonder card has a smaller, but still impressive, range of video-connection options. The TV-tuner lets you turn your PC into a digital VCR. You can capture video and audio from a range of devices. With Dolby Digital out and DVD decoding you can make your PC the centre of your home-theatre system - the 8500's RF wireless remote is not included with the 7500 but will work if bought separately. You can also output to various devices and use several screens with ATI's HydraVision software.

A core speed of 260MHz is fine but the RAM, at 180MHz DDR, is down nearly 100MHz from the 8500 cards. This is reflected in the benchmarking, with the 7500 scoring roughly between a GF4 MX420 and MX440 - beating only the Gigabyte 7000 card in this roundup. Still, this isn't meant to be a gaming card and for the price the feature set is excellent - while still allowing you to play most games at a bearable if not cutting-edge speed.

BENCHMARKS

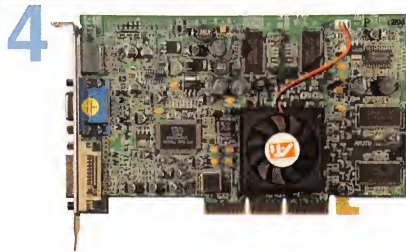


BENCHMARKS



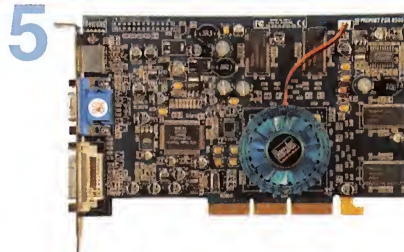
As we saw in PCPP#74, nVIDIA's dominance of the desktop 3D graphics market has resulted in a broad spread of products from many vendors using nVIDIA chipsets. However, that doesn't mean the market is devoid of competitors - ATI has been a player for a long time and recently its Radeon chipsets have mounted quite a comeback. Recently Radeon has adopted a similar approach to nVIDIA, allowing other manufacturers to create products based on its chipsets. In this issue we have six such cards from three different manufacturers using 3 different chipsets - all powered by ATI.

PowerColor
Radeon 8500 Evil Master II (128MB)



The trend of unusual names continues with PowerColor's cards having perhaps the strangest. This card is similar in layout to all the 8500 cards and has some impressive features. The ATI Rage Theatre companion chip is onboard, which they claim gives better quality TV-out and DVD decoding. The card also implements ATI's HydraVision, allowing dual-monitor support and they include a DVI-SVGA adapter so you can connect a second monitor to the flat-panel connector. Also in the box are various cables for connecting the TV-out port to S-Video or RCA composite devices, a driver/utility CD and a bundle version of the game Rune. Curiously, the only thing identifying this entire package as PowerColor is the box. The card, manual and driver CD are all branded as ATI. This does bode well for both ATI and the smaller manufacturers, as this is similar to how many have taken nVIDIA's reference design/package and run with it, much to their success in the market. A core speed of 260MHz and memory at 250MHz is odd, being midway between a RadeonLE and its 64MB PowerColor sibling. Nonetheless, this card ranked third-highest in the benchmarks - roughly on par with a GF3 Ti500 at medium resolution but lagging behind as the resolution increases.

Hercules
3D Prophet FDX 8500 LE

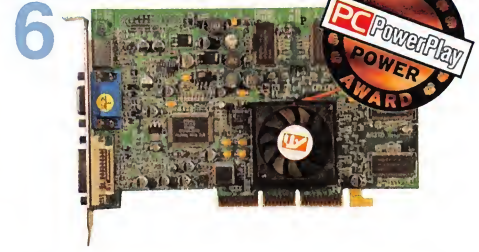


With the apparent breakdown of the nVIDIA and Hercules partnership, it's no surprise to see Hercules embracing the ATI range. The 8500 is the top-end Radeon chipset, aimed pretty squarely at nVIDIA's GeForce3. The LE variant as seen here is identical to the normal 8500 apart from slightly lower clock-speeds, at 250 MHz for both core and memory, of which it has 64MB - DDR of course.

Hercules cards are always well presented and this one is no exception. The eye-catching box contains a copy of PowerDVD, a driver/demo/utility CD, concise but clear manuals for the card and PowerDVD, a S-Video to composite converter for TV-out and even a sheet of stickers to adorn your PC. The card also has the familiar DVI port for flat-panel screens or, with an adapter you'll have to buy separately, a 2nd monitor. ATI's HydraVision can then be used to spread your desktop across both screens.

Speedwise, this card fared well, coming in consistently second - not too surprising given the respective clock-speeds across the 8500 cards. It's interesting to see the Hercules card beating the 128MB PowerColor offering which has more memory - not that that directly affects speed - and a 10MHz faster core speed.

PowerColor
Radeon 8500 Evil Master II 64MB version



As indicated by the names, this card is virtually identical at first glance to the 128MB version. The only visible difference is the use of Hynix memory instead of the Samsung on the 128MB card. The package is identical to the 128MB card's apart from the inclusion of a CD with PowerDVD on it - an odd thing to leave out of the 128MB card's package. A sticker on the box denotes another difference - this card is clocked at 275MHz for both graphics processor and memory. This gives it the speed edge over its 128MB sibling and indeed over every other card in this roundup, handily beating a GF3 Ti500 in all resolutions and approaching, but never quite meeting, GF4 Ti4400 speeds. For a card priced more like a GF3 Ti200, that's an excellent showing - winning it PCPP's value award. It's tempting to assign it the power award also, but realistically there are faster nVIDIA-based cards out there, albeit much more expensive ones. ATI's already hinted-at future offerings will pose more of a challenge to the high-end cards but this one is no slouch and if you're looking to buy now it's definitely worth considering.

Conclusions:

While no match for the latest nVIDIA offerings, the 8500 can hold its own with cards of its own generation - the GF3 Titanium series - and realistically provide a lot of graphic grunt for all but the most hardened benchmark addict. A quick hunt around a few online vendors reveals them to be good in the bang-for-bucks stakes, too. Extra features such as dual-monitor support and the bristling connectors of the All-In-Wonder cards make them even more tempting. ATI's chipsets continue to impress and the offerings from various vendors here only add to that. NVIDIA may be leading the way now, but it seems it can't get too complacent about that position - which is great for consumers.

Benchmark Setup

Soltek SL-75DRV5 KT333 motherboard
AMD AthlonXP 1600+ CPU (1.4GHz,
133x10.5)
KingMax DDR400 SDRAM (at 333MHz @
CAS2.5)
IBM 75GXP 30GB HDD

Software:

Windows 2000 SP2
DirectX 8.1
VIA 4-in-1 (motherboard chipset drivers)
v438(2)v(a)

3DMark2001SE from www.madonion.com
Quake3 Arena from www.idsoftware.com

The defaults were used in all benchmarks except the High Quality 1600x1200 test in Quake3, where the Geometric Detail was set to High and the Texture Detail slider was moved all the way over to the right. The demo used in Q3 is OCAU's "Slayer" demo as it's more grueling than the default demos -

more info at

www.overclockers.com.au/techstuff/a_q3_slayer

40x CD Burner Shootout

ASUS CRW-4012A vs TDK VeloCD X481240A

There are now enough 40x burners on the street for the discerning buyer to be choosy. While CD writers are guaranteed to burn data, there are some discriminators to be examined if you need that all-in-one drive (CloneCD users take note!). The TDK VeloCD X481240A and the ASUS CRW-4012A fell into our lap for a head-to-head comparison at just the right time. Both claim to be rip-snorters at everything but testing revealed a few surprises.

It's important to remember that the ability to actually write at 40x depends on media, the burning program, drive technology and the length of the data to be written. High read and write speeds (data) occur near the end of a disc, at the outer edge while DAE (Digital Audio Extraction) can be quick anywhere on the disc.

Look and feel

The ASUS is the perfect beige for PC cases (this is important!) with a chunky though not undesirable masculine look. The TDK is lighter in colour and initially has a garish, blue tray face that later grew on me, especially in the dark. Both have a jet engine 'whoosh' as they fire up to speed, but while the ASUS quietened soon after spin-up, the TDK 'whooshed' on.

Features

Both drives are UDMA capable and employ P-CAV (Partial-Constant Angular Velocity) for reading and Z-CLV (Zone-Constant Angular Velocity) for writing. The ASUS can write CD-Rs at 4x, 8x and 12x while the TDK has only an 8x and 16x minimum. Both are high-speed, 12x CD-RW capable. The TDK

real 90' CD-R (92:59:74, 817/938 MB). Both overburned on the DSTs in Nero to 93:00:00 (93 min) without error.

Game CDs

LITEON B model owners, take note - the ASUS is your next drive! Quite simply, the most outstanding game companion I've seen; you don't even need a

'confused' during that test. TDK includes the digital mixer software using the Nero burning engine. Sure a TDK-ripped audio disc takes three minutes but even my dud ear could tell the difference compared to a real rip. But it's safe to say that the TDK has superior audio performance and this is reflected in the price.

ASUS
CRW-4012A



Price: \$205

Distributor: ASUS

URL: www.achieve.com.au

Phone: 02 9742 3288

Best all-round drive yet for the price. Not as good as a Plextor with audio but better than a LITEON. Performs well

SCORE

92

dedicated Toshiba DVD reader like the SD-M1402 partnered with this fella. Like, how about laying down a LaserLock image (Desperados) in two minutes 53 seconds! Effortless writes of the latest SafeDisc 2-protected games (Medal of Honor) are also possible. Don't even think about this with the TDK. However both drives can backup LibCrypt-protected PSX CDs and SecuROM-protected CDs.

Audio

Both drives score perfect tens in the audio department, have accurate streaming and no timing errors (jitter). Feurio! had problems with both drives, especially the TDK but I managed to rip high quality audio with both drives eventually. I think it was more to do with Feurio! than the drives. ExactAudioCopy found that no offset was required for the TDK while the ASUS got a little

Data

Hmmm...sorry TDK but the ASUS is a lot faster. This is what it's all about though - data. Using Nero 5.5.8.0, the TDK took five minutes, one second to write a 703MB Mode 1 ISO compilation to a 32x CD-R. The ASUS took only three minutes, 52 seconds. That's 29% faster! The TDK can read up to 48x and it was noticeably faster than the ASUS installing game and data CDs - probably 30-40 seconds faster on a big game install. The TDK choked on a mixed-mode CD read (audio/data) in Nero CD Speed, evidenced by the drop in speed from about 40x to 8x - not a good sign.

Overall

If you want a drive that will just 'do it' consider the ASUS - it's also much cheaper, by \$170! If you're sensitive about name-brands and you're an audiophile then the TDK is for you (if you don't already own a Plextor).

Stuart Calvin

TDK
X481240A



Price: \$375

Distributor: TDK

URL: www.tdk.com.au

Phone: 02 8437 0600

A near great, all-round drive. Its fast rip claim is a furphy when using a good audio ripping application. A little slow.

SCORE

81

Packaging

Both drives are well boxed with the right stuff and goodies. Both ensembles have quality widgets and Nero Burning ROM. TDK provided two 32x CD-Rs and ASUS a 40x CD-R. TDK gets the marks for little extras in the box - extra bumf and marking pen - and loses a few for lack of a 40x CD-R.

can read and rip at 48x with the ASUS maxing at 40x. Both are advertised to perform RAW-DAO 96 allowing karaoke, CD-text and CD-graphics writes.

Overburning

The ASUS correctly identified my 90-minute DST (Digital Storage Technology) CD-R as the 80-minute disc it really is (79:59:74, 703 MB data, 807 MB audio). The TDK identified the DST disc as a

17" LCD Monitor Shootout

LG

Flatron 855LE

In many different areas in life bigger means better (we'll leave that to your imagination) and the field of LCD monitors is no exception. The Flatron 855LE is as big as it is beautiful and that's saying a lot. 18.1" may not seem like a hell of a lot when talking about CRT monitors but the supreme flatness of an LCD monitor makes the viewing area comparable to a 20" CRT. Even in this day and age that's still big. The unit itself looks quite sparse - a few tiny contact points on the face and an on/off button and that's it, but a lot of gaming goodness hides behind the seemingly dull exterior.

The monitor supports native resolutions up to 1280 x 1024 @75Hz, which should keep everyone happy. Unlike the

majority of LCD monitors we have looked at in the past, the 855LE suffers very little from motion blur, only becoming hazy when the image is very busy and contains a great deal of movement. We've been using it during the regular Quake matches with no problems whatsoever. Many LCD monitors also have a problem showing explosions, either becoming blurry or pixelised - once again this is not the case with the Flatron. We also tested the monitor for how it handled video and we're delighted to say that it handled itself very well, giving us a good clear picture with excellent colour depth and clarity. A good CRT will still handle video better but this is about the best we've seen in an LCD monitor. An

excellent viewing angle also means that you don't have to be sitting square in front of the monitor to enjoy the show.

Setup is a breeze as the monitor accepts both analogue and digital input and the face

buttons are very straightforward and don't take a genius to operate. It's a pricey piece of work but one well worth it if you have the money.

Daniel Wilks



Price: \$3199

Distributor: LG

URL: www.lge.com.au

Phone: 1800 643 156

An excellent and big LCD monitor, the only real downside is the price.

SCORE

90

Sony

SDM-S81 18" LCD

The SDM-S81 features a beautifully flat 18" viewing area making it around the equivalent of a 20" CRT. The monitor has a good slim design and takes up very little desk space. Seven face buttons adjust all variables and are easy to use without being obtrusive. Oddly, the monitor does not feature a digital input, only an analogue RGB connector. With the majority of modern Video Cards featuring digital-out it's disappointing to see that Sony is not taking advantage of the superior transfer medium. The monitor has an excellent viewing angle, making up for its lack of digital-in - however we tilted the monitor, we could still see a good clear image.

The SDM-S81 delivers

fantastically clear pictures at resolutions up to 1280 x 1024 @85Hz with beautifully rich colours and excellent image depth. At the optimal resolution of 1024 x 768 the monitors produces some of the crispest images and text that we've seen in the PCPP labs. Unfortunately the monitor does not fare nearly as well when it comes to motion. Any fast movement caused a lot of motion blur, rendering games such as Quake 3 and Tony Hawk 3 nearly unplayable. Busy, moving images blurred into a poorly differentiated but very nicely coloured mess. It must be said that the majority of LCD monitors are not meant for gaming purposes, but that being the case, the SDM-S81 still performed poorly. Likewise, the

monitor performed poorly with video, softening edges and generally blurring any moderately fast motion.

If you're a gaming nut then you should definitely give the SDM-

S81 a miss, but if Photoshop or some other form of image manipulation is your bag and you have enough money, then you definitely won't be disappointed.

Daniel Wilks



Price: \$2,999

Distributor: Sony

URL: www.sony.com.au

Phone: 1300 13 7669

Amazing still image quality but very poor motion makes the SDM-S81 a big no for gamers but a big yes for artists.

SCORE

80

Direct2U

3D game glasses.

LCD shutter glasses aren't new and in fact at PCPP we reviewed our very first pair way back in issue 1. Thankfully, NVIDIA have always been keen supporters of the technology and kept it from obscurity by incorporating hardware compatibility into its video cards since the TNT. The way they work is by blocking the left eye through filling the glasses left lens with LCD then displaying an image on the monitor which the right eye sees. The left lens then clears and the right lens fills with LCD allowing only the left eye to see a left image on the monitor. This is done many times a second and effectively fools the brain into believing its seeing a 3D image off a 2D display device (IMAX 3D movies employ the same shutter glass technology and are an affordable way to sample).

The effect is really quite

astounding and the level of depth perception is completely convincing. You literally see a discernible 3D image that extends into, and out of your monitor. Compatibility is also a non-issue as any Direct3D game can be rendered stereoscopically with first person shooters providing the best results. Games such as Dungeon Siege or any kind of point and clicker are a little awkward to play but only because of the quality of the 3D. Moving your mouse up along the Y-axis to tell a character to move further into the Z-axis takes a little getting used to.

Although producing fantastic results, shutter glasses do have a down side. As 3D requires a left and right image to be rendered it halves your fill and monitor refresh rate. A refresh of 100hz for example would become 50hz because of the need to sync and



render the left eye to odd frames and the right eye to even frames. Likewise your video card now has double the amount of work to do processing a left/right image.

Physically, the direct2U 3D gaming glasses are light and comfortable to wear but prolonged use (over 2 hours straight) can result in a headache and very dry

eyes as the constant flickering inhibits blinking. The drivers however allow for stereoscopic vision to be turned on and off with a hotkey should eyestrain develop.

Given the relatively low price of the glasses, they're a worthy addition to a hardcore gamers collection. Just remember to blink.

Jere Lawrence.

Price: \$154

Distributor: Direct 2U

URL: www.direct2u.com.au

Phone: N/A

Awesome 3D effect but it produces considerable eyestrain and headaches

SCORE

82

APC

Back UPS ES 350

For hours you've been furiously typing at the keyboard with a plethora of ideas sweeping through your head and you dare not stop for fear of losing "the flow". Then it happens, the lights go out, the monitor's image recedes into a sliver of light and the noise of your hard drive winding down echoes your screams. A power outage has occurred and your work, along with your sanity is all but a distant memory.

For years uninterruptible power supplies (UPSs) have been large bulky devices that weighed a ton, cost a fortune and were mainly used for keeping uber-expensive servers running. That was until the APC ES 350, a consumer/SOHO level UPS.

Looking like a slightly bulky but much sexier power board, the ES 350 with its sealed Lead-Acid

rechargeable battery can power one PC for 11 minutes or three PCs for approximately 6 minutes – more than enough time to shutdown in the event of a blackout. Other functions include protection from surges up to 350kVA and an RJ-11 input and output port so that you can also surge protect your modem (ADSL or conventional) from power that comes through the phone lines. Although the ES 350 can protect and power any device, the addition of a USB port on the board allows it to be connected to a PC and with the provided drivers can automatically shut down your system in the event of a power outage. The ES 350 won't make your games faster but it will protect your valuable hardware from damage. For that reason it should be considered an essential item.

Jere Lawrence



Price: \$262

Distributor: APC

URL: asia.apccjpaa.com/au/

Phone: N/A

A must-have for any PC owner who fears the spectre of the blackout

SCORE

91

Abit AT7 KT333



In today's motherboard industry, innovation is the key. This is mainly because different branded motherboards based on the same chipset perform virtually identically. Subsequently, each manufacturer has to try to make its product stand out from the rest with added functionality.

Legacy Free

Enter Abit's latest motherboard based on the VIA KT333 chipset - the AT7. Part of Abit's new MAX line of products is unique in many ways. Firstly, it lacks many of the outdated legacy ports (PS/2, Serial and Parallel) and replaces them with newer, more advanced technologies. These include: two USB 2.0 ports, two firewire ports, an integrated Realtek 10/100 ethernet adapter and onboard 5.1 channel audio!

USB 2.0

Offering a transfer rate of only 12mbps, USB 1.1, which was now slower than 100mbps ethernet could either upgrade or be absorbed by IEEE's firewire. The result was USB 2.0 with a transfer rate of 480mbps - 40 times faster than USB 1.1. Compare this to firewire (also known as IEEE1394) that has a transfer rate of 400mbps, and it is pretty clear to see why Abit are so eager to get rid of the old legacy ports in favour of these new standards.

Benchmarking

The AT7 was tested on an AMD AthlonXP 1800+ with 256MB DDR333 memory and GeForce3. The AT7 was compared to the Soltek 75DRV5 with the VIA KT333 chipset and all tests gave consistent results - the Abit AT7 slightly outperforming the Soltek 75DRV5. The AT7 also passed 12 hours of the Prime95 torture test without one crash.

Onboard 5.1 sound

Utilising the Realtek ALC650 (AC-Link) chipset the onboard audio controller provides 24-bit SPDIF OUT, line-in, centre/sub/front speaker connectors, 6CH DAC for AC3 5.1 and a microphone-in port. The sound quality produced by the ALC650 audio is certainly adequate for users on a budget but don't expect it to be the same quality that you would get from say, a Soundblaster Audigy.

Board layout

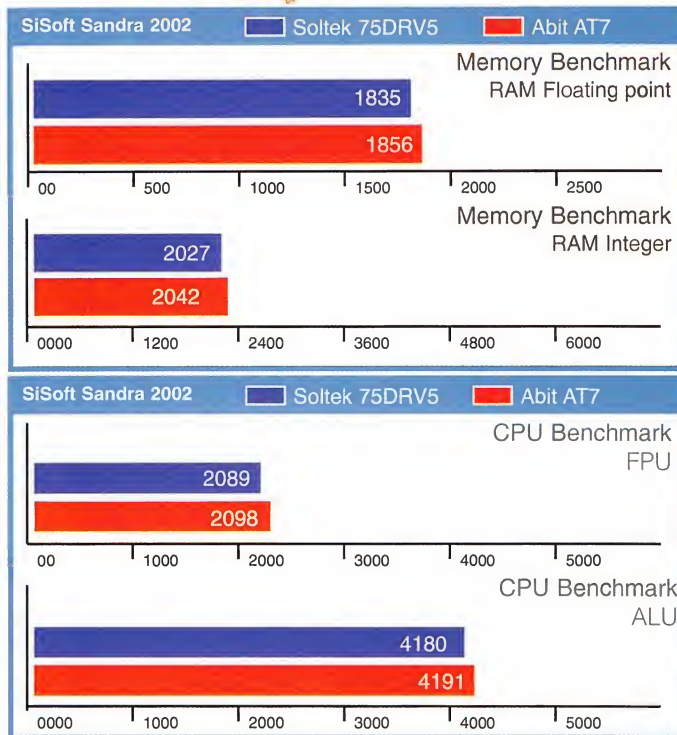
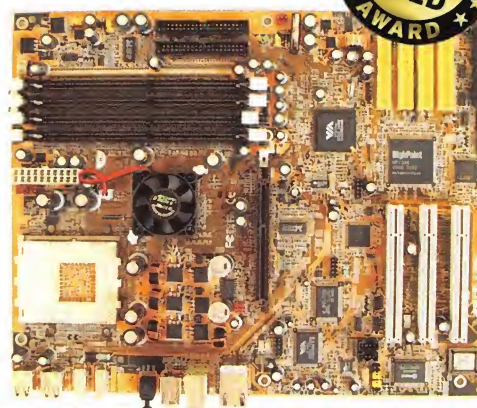
The AT7 also features three PCI slots, one AGP 2x/4x slot and 4 DDR333 DIMM slots that support a maximum of 2GB unbuffered and 3GB registered memory. Only three PCI slots might seem meagre but with all of the onboard controllers it's unlikely Abit could have fit any extra PCI slots onto the board without straying from the ATX form factor. Aside from that the AT7 is virtually legacy free though floppy drive connectors still remain. Considering the rich feature-set of the AT7 and the number of chipsets on the board it's no surprise to discover that it lacks CNR, AMR and ISA slots. Aside from OEMs, these slots are rarely used these days and usually just take up space on the motherboard that could be used for more important purposes

Overclocking

As far as overclocking goes, the AT7 is certainly not lacking. It gives users the ability to adjust FSB speeds between 100MHz and 250MHz in 1MHz increments as well as multiplier adjustments between 5.5 and 12.5. Core, I/O and DRAM voltages can also be adjusted to help you gain stability at high-overclocked speeds.

CPU location

Although hard to fault the Abit AT7, there is one complaint. Due



to the fact that the CPU socket has been placed towards the top of the board, it is nearly impossible to add or remove your heatsink/fan unit while the motherboard is installed into a regular sized case. Everything else, including the IDE, floppy and power supply connectors were logically placed, ensuring that no cables run over the top of your heatsink/fan unit or PCI slots.

Conclusion

Overall, the AT7 is a very impressive motherboard. It's fast, stable, feature-rich and includes extensive overclocking options to boot. If you're in the market for a new motherboard to go with your AMD AthlonXP or Duron processor, make sure you give the Abit AT7 some serious consideration.

Asher Moses

Price: \$380

Distributor: ABit

URL: www.abit.com.tw

Phone: N/A

High performing,
stable and feature-
rich. Highly
recommended.

SCORE

93

Logitech

Wingman Gamepad

Once again Logitech has put together a gamepad that pleases both aesthetically and in usability, but in this case you should definitely try before you buy. Why? Well for a start, \$130 is a lot of money to fork out for a game controller. Secondly the pad is very heavy - far more so than pretty much any other peripheral on the market and that includes the inordinately oversized Xbox controller. That said, you do get a lot of good functionality for the price - two nicely responsive analogue sticks, a D-pad, nine face buttons, four triggers and a throttle slide. The pad uses a 2.4 GHz spread spectrum so you can use the pad up to nearly 20' away from the receiver with little or no lag and up to eight pads can be used together with no interference.

The controller itself is quite large but fits comfortably in the hand and gives good access to all the

controls and buttons. The Wingman Cordless opts for a six-button layout for the right thumb rather than the standard four. This causes a few problems due to the close proximity of the buttons but a little practice should clear them up. Both analogue sticks offer up a good degree of control but feel a little too loose and floating. The D-pad only has a small range of movement but does its job well. Surprisingly for a cordless pad, the Wingman Cordless Rumblepad features, true to its name, some very powerful force-feedback - in fact, some of the most powerful we've felt in a PC peripheral. Four AA batteries power the pad and seriously add to the weight. The feedback may be powerful but you might want to strengthen your wrists a bit before trying to tackle a marathon gaming session with this bad boy.

Daniel Wilks



Price: \$129.95

Distributor: Logitech

URL: www.logitech.com

Phone: 02 9972 3711

Another fine pad from Logitech with a price tag nearly as weighty as the controller itself.

SCORE

84

Nostromo

N45 Dual Analogue

Don't let yourself be fooled by the Nostromo N45 gamepad's strange appearance into thinking that it's just another flash in the pan from a third party peripheral maker trying to break into the market with a funky looking but otherwise pretty shoddy pad. The N45 is a comfortable, highly responsive and extremely programmable piece of gaming technology. Mapped similarly to the PS2 Dual Shock controller, the N45 features seven face buttons, four well placed triggers, two comfortable and responsive analogue sticks and a D-pad. Both the analogue sticks can also be clicked in, adding an extra button function. The oddest feature is the Action Stabiliser Bar - a piece of molded plastic bridging the base of both grips. Though Belkin claims it offers more stability, we found it served no real purpose apart from making the pad so hardy you couldn't break it without a concerted effort.

Both the D-pad and analogue sticks are highly responsive and offer a good degree of resistance. Unfortunately the sticks are too close together for our liking. The placement doesn't hinder gameplay to any great extent but can cause embarrassing thumb clashes in the heat of the moment. The buttons however, are well placed and in easy reach. By far the N45's greatest feature is its extreme level of programmability. With the software included it's possible to program up to 70 different functions, different button layouts for different users (saved as profiles) and even button combination macros. One of the face buttons also allows the pad to be used as a mouse. The only thing stopping this pad from being a classic is the lack of any force-feedback, a flaw that will hopefully be rectified in the next Belkin pad.

Daniel Wilks



Price: \$49.95

Distributor: Belkin

URL: www.belkin.com.au

Phone: 02 4372 8600

A great pad that stops just short of being a classic due to the lack of any force-feedback.

SCORE

88

MSI

845 GIVE ME 533

533 MHz

Bluetooth

DDR

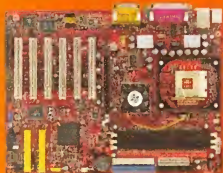
Intel LAN

Channel

USB 2.0

845E Max2-BLR

Intel® 845E chipset Socket 478 ATX

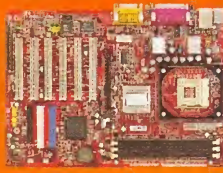


Bluetooth
USB 2.0
S-Bracket
D-Bracket
Intel LAN

- Support Intel® Pentium® 4 processor up to 2.4GHz
- FSB: 400 MHz clock and higher
- USB 2.0 Technology
- 3 DIMMs, up to 2GB of DDR 266(PC2100) Memory supported
- LAN on board- Intel® 82562ET (Optional)
- Hardware monitoring function
- Suspend to RAM / Disk function
- AC'97 6-channel audio S-Bracket is supported
- 6 PCI/1CNR/1AGP
- PC2PC- Bluetooth(Optional) / S-Bracket / MSIDVD 5.1Ch / Live Driver™ / Live BIOS™ / Fuzzy Logic™ 3 / D-Bracket™

845G Max-L

Intel® 845G chipset Socket 478 ATX

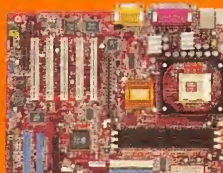


USB 2.0
D-Bracket
Intel LAN

- Support Intel® Pentium® 4 processor to 2.4GHz
- FSB: 400 MHz clock and higher
- USB 2.0 Technology
- 3 DIMMs, up to 2GB of DDR 266(PC2100) Memory supported
- LAN on board- Intel® 82562ET (Optional)
- Hardware monitoring function
- Suspend to RAM / Disk function
- Integrated 3D/2D graphic core on GMCH chipset
- AC'97 audio
- 6 PCI/1CNR/1AGP
- Live Driver™ / Live BIOS™ / Fuzzy Logic™ 3 / D-Bracket™

645E Max2-LRU

SIS® 645DX Socket 478 ATX DDR333



ATA 133
DDR 333
USB 2.0
S-Bracket
D-Bracket
FSB533

- Support Intel® Pentium® 4 processor to 2.4 GHz
- FSB: 400/533 MHz clock
- ATA 133 RAID 0, 1, 0+1
- USB 2.0 Technology
- 3 DIMMs, up to 3GB of DDR 266(PC2100) and DDR 333 (PC2700) Memory supported
- LAN on board- RealTek® RTL8101L
- Modem Riser(Optional)
- AC'97 6-channel audio
- 5 PCI/1CNR/1AGP
- S-Bracket(Optional) / D-Bracket™ / Live BIOS™ / Live Driver™ / Fuzzy Logic™ 3

G4MX4600-VT

SIS® 645DX Socket 478 ATX DDR333



- nVIDIA® nfiniteFX™ II - Featuring Dual programmable Vertex Shaders and Advanced programmable Pixel Shader - enables a virtually infinite number of special effects.
- nVIDIA® nView™ - Display technology provides the ultimate display flexibility and user-friendly control.
- nVIDIA® Accuview Antialiasing™ - Delivers unbeatable visual quality and frame rate.

- NVIDIA® 4th Generation GPU - GeForce4™ Titanium series
- NVIDIA® nfiniteFX™ II Engine
- Dual Programmable Vertex Shaders
- Advanced Programmable Pixel Shader
- 3D Textures & Shadow Buffers
- Z-Correct Bump Mapping
- Accuview Antialiasing™ Subsystem
- nView™ Display Technology



For more information visit our website www.msicomputer.com.au

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WA Tel (08) 9389 4422
VIC Tel (03) 9281 3750



MSI™
Link to the Future

SETUP

STUART CALVIN WAXES TECHNICAL

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Craig Smith wins this fabulous GeForce4 MX440 from Sparkle and Australia IT just for writing in! Truly, the beefiest of budget cards, the GF4 MX400 caters for all your gaming needs.



DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

Stuart Calvin helps Craig Smith with a prickly S/PDIF problem

CRAIG ASKS

I recently purchased a new Athlon XP1700 PC and having been swayed by PC PowerPlay, installed everything on the MSI K7n420 Pro motherboard which uses the new Nvidia motherboard chipset. The motherboard has integrated sound, but also has an installed S/PDIF outlet which is something I am unfamiliar with. I understand it's for digital sound, but what exactly am I supposed to plug into it? I thought I would simply plug my speakers into the S/PDIF-out jack but they don't fit. What do I need to buy?

AND STUART REPLIES

You are being deprived of gaming goodness! In short, you'll need to buy some digital cables and digital speakers if you don't already have them. If you have a mismatch of connectors then you'll need to consider a signal/interface converter like the CO2. My first thought is that the store should have ensured that the equipment they sold you was compatible with the gear you already had, or even more obviously recommended some other gear they were selling at the time. However, as a gamer, you can still tap the digital output of your sound card and CD-ROM drive to enjoy high quality playback from your games.



History

Although S/PDIF or the Sony/Philips Digital Interconnect Format has been

CONVERT THIS!

If you're sending a S/PDIF optical signal to a device with only a coaxial input, you'll need to convert the signal and interface from TTL optical to 0.5Vpp coaxial using something like a CO2 interface/signal-converter. Example: If your sound card has an optical socket for digital audio output (but no coaxial socket) and your speaker set has coaxial input (but no optical socket), you'll need that signal-converter. You'll also need coaxial and optical cables to complete all connections. This is probably what most gamers will be up against as multimedia components are purchased separately over time.

around for as long as consumer digital audio, it's only recently that the format has become popular.

The emergence of the Compact Disc (CD-Digital Audio or CD-DA) in the early 1980s provided the ability to keep audio in a digital format all the way from the player to the speaker-set. S/PDIF was first used in consumer hi-fi to connect CD players to external Digital to Analogue Converters (DAC) since nearly all speakers were analogue. This early technology took a digital signal from the CD player and converted it to an analog signal, but now we want to keep signals in the digital domain as long as possible because this is the only way to maintain signal quality.

The idea behind using digital output is that most CD-ROM drives

have only a low quality Digital to Analogue Converter (DAC). That's why CD music played on a CD-ROM drive doesn't sound as good as when it's played on a CD-DA player. PC multimedia hardware increasingly supports S/PDIF input and output with sockets now found at the rear of many CD-ROM/DVD-ROM players, sound cards and speakers.



Format

Digital audio is very cool but with the growing popularity and possibilities of digital playback and recording, a new problem arises: system interconnectivity.

Digital audio comprises a transfer format through fibre-optic or very high quality co-axial cables. Both professional and consumer forms of the digital standard exist. The consumer S/PDIF format is found on PC multimedia hardware as well as consumer electronic separates such as CD-DA, MiniDisc (MD), Digital Compact Cassette (DCC) and Digital Audio Tape (DAT) recorders and players. The professional format of AES/EBU (from the Audio Engineering Society and the European Broadcasting Union) is not common on consumer hardware. Assigned the international standard number IEC-958, S/PDIF was originally designed to be the standard for transmitting audio data between CD players and DAT players, at a time when DAT was thought to be the next consumer audio recording medium.

S/PDIF transmits standard digital

audio in stereo, but fortunately can also carry multichannel datastreams such as Dolby AC3 and Digital Theatre Sound (DTS). Many people will be familiar with the superiority of AC3 over PCM stereo. Although AC3 is highly compressed (1/12 original size) it still sounds great. DTS is also compressed but only to a quarter of its original size and is a remarkable



SOCKET TO ME

Many CD-ROM drives have a 2-pin TTL digital output socket in the back of the drive and this is sometimes called S/PDIF. It may be labelled as "Digital Output", "Reserved", or not be labelled at all. It's usually located near the analog line-output socket. Unfortunately the electrical signal which comes from it is not exactly what is described in S/PDIF specifications. The data format is exactly the same, only the signal is 5Vpp instead of the regular 0.5Vpp signal. Some two-pin sockets accept both 0.5Vpp and 5Vpp TTL but you need to check the drive specs. Good drives have a four-pin S/PDIF-out socket. If you find a four-pin socket marked "R-G-G-L" or just an unlabelled socket, it's probably an analog line-level socket.

TTL!?

Transistor-Transistor Logic is the electrical connection to and from TOSLink modules and is always a 5V peak to peak (on/off) pulse. High quality optical interfaces offer several advantages in terms of galvanic isolation and freedom from electro-magnetic interference, but cheap plastic cables suffer from restricted bandwidths and high dispersion, which can result in jitter. Stick to good quality fibre cables, since degradation of the optical signal will cause distortion, noise and even loss of signal in extreme cases. Again, speciality cables make no difference to the final sound quality, so don't go spending serious money.

improvement over AC3. The S/PDIF output, typically from a sound card, is capable of providing digital audio to external speakers or an external decoder, if needed, such as a digital AV amplifier/receiver. If you own a home AV, you can connect the digital output of the sound card to the amp and enjoy high quality playback - w00t! S/PDIF is not a decoder as it only transmits audio, so don't expect to be able to hear on anything other than something that can decode!



Connectivity

While the consumer and professional formats are quite compatible with each other, differing only in the subcode information and connector, the interfaces differ. The data protocol is universal across all S/PDIF devices and can support different sampling rates and resolutions between 16 and 24 bits. S/PDIF uses either unbalanced coaxial cable or fibre optic cable. Often, both types of S/PDIF inputs/outputs are present on PC hardware. You will encounter the following types of interfaces:

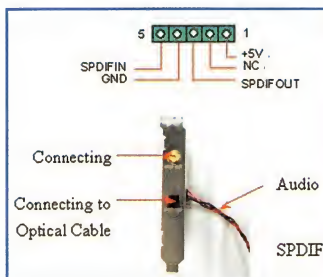
Co-axial. The 75-Ohms source impedance and high signal frequencies (0.1 to 6 MHz) require reasonable quality cable with RCA phono jacks to operate reliably (sometimes BNC connectors are

found). Given the source amplitude of the data signal is only 0.5Vpp, this restricts the transmission distance to short cable but runs up to 15 metres with quality cable. In the real world, it's best limited to ten metres. Coaxial is inexpensive and is the same cable used in video transmission (a video cable with RCA phono connectors to connect S/PDIF equipment will work). It is important to avoid 'low noise' cable for digital connections since it has very poor high-frequency transmission capabilities. Audio speciality shops love to sell the 'ultimate' cable for mega-bucks, but a cable which you could easily make yourself should cost no more than \$50 using quality materials.

TOSLink. The TOSLink interface uses glass or plastic fibre optic cables that plug into TOSLink modules. Transmission is achieved with a red transmitting LED and an opto-sensor as the receiver. The optical signals have exactly the same format as the electrical S/PDIF signals, they are just converted to on/off light signals. Because of high, light signal attenuation in the TOSLink cable, the transmission distance available using this technique is less than 10 metres. Audio stores also like to over-charge for these cables, selling 2-3 metre cables for upwards of \$100 whereas they should be less than \$30. There are two

ANALOG + DIGITAL?

Can analog audio cables be used with digital audio signals? Note that the coaxial cable required is not audio cable but a video-grade radio frequency cable with impedance of 75 Ohms using RCA phono connectors. It is now unfortunately de rigeur to use standard audio cable for S/PDIF, but it's not recommended and the transmission quality can vary because S/PDIF was never intended to run through audio cables. Standard audio cables can work for transmitting S/PDIF over short distances, but anything over a metre should use 75-Ohm coaxial cable. The impedance of most typical analog audio cables ranges from 40 to 70 Ohms which is a mismatch from the nominal 75-Ohms impedance (110 for AES/EBU) and results in signal reflection and jitter causing bit errors at the receiver or speakers.



styles of TOSLink modules. Some have the standard square TOSLink plug and the others have a 1/8" plug usually found on MD recorders. You can get modules of either type and you can also get cables that connect between one and the other. The 1/8" style is purely for compactness in small devices. Other than the shape of the plug, it works the same way. A three-metre cable run is a reliable maximum length.

How do I use S/PDIF?

Using the right smaller digital audio cable, you interconnect the CD-ROM drive S/PDIF-CD connector to bypass the crappy DAC, and the S/PDIF-in socket on the sound card (which bears S/PDIF digital output). If you are using this connector on your CD-ROM, you should mute the regular CD audio input of your mixer so that you will not get a doubled sound. Before you connect your sound card to any S/PDIF compatible device, you will need to configure your sound card and player in Device Manager. You must have a S/PDIF-supported speaker set with S/PDIF sockets to make the most of this! Remember to bypass the CD-ROM DAC using the S/PDIF_OUT socket on the drive! Check your connectors and purchase the necessary cables. Creative Labs sells interface/signal converters at reasonable prices.



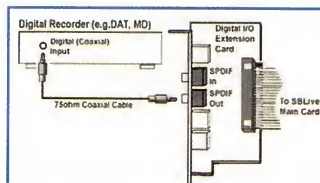
Bottom digitally pure line

At this point in time, optical connections are probably better left for connections to high-end hi-fi equipment. Coaxial connections are more popular on modern speaker sets

WHAT'S BEST?

For crosstalk and noise immunity fibre optic cable is best, the advantage being that since it's non-conducting, earth-loops can't be generated and the link is immune to hum and noise pickup from crosstalk. Twisted-pairs are second (AES/EBU) as noise pickup and crosstalk varies with the quality of the twisted pair and the number of twists per inch. Coaxial is last because being an unbalanced line it offers no inherent immunity other than the shield. For impedance stability and bit error rates, coaxial is king; it has most stable construction with the most stable impedance, the fewest reflections (return loss) and can therefore go farther than any of the three. Twisted pairs are next. Common AES/EBU cable is around +/- 10 Ohms for the good stuff. Fibre's last as there is optical refraction/reflection within the fibre which does the damage. Plastic is terrible in this regard. Glass fibre would win everything but it's rare and hardly suitable for the home consumer (it's sooooo fragile and expensive). If jitter is your problem then consider glass fibre (ouch!), coaxial, twisted pairs then plastic fibre.

and most sound cards have a coaxial digital output at least, rather than a TOSLink module or perhaps both types. Fully featured 'break-out' sound boxes have all manner and types of sockets, with on-board decoding included, often allowing fulltime connection to pre-amps, speakers, MDs and anything else that takes your fancy. Be aware that some sound cards cannot and never will decode audio streams despite the presence of digital sockets - they are simply a pass-through interface for use between the CD-ROM drive and a pre-amp. Coaxial digital speaker sets can be had for around \$100 and with the right sound card and cables, gaming goodness can not only be complete, it can be (and is!) 4w3s0m3.



SETUP

STUART CALVIN WAXES TECHNICAL

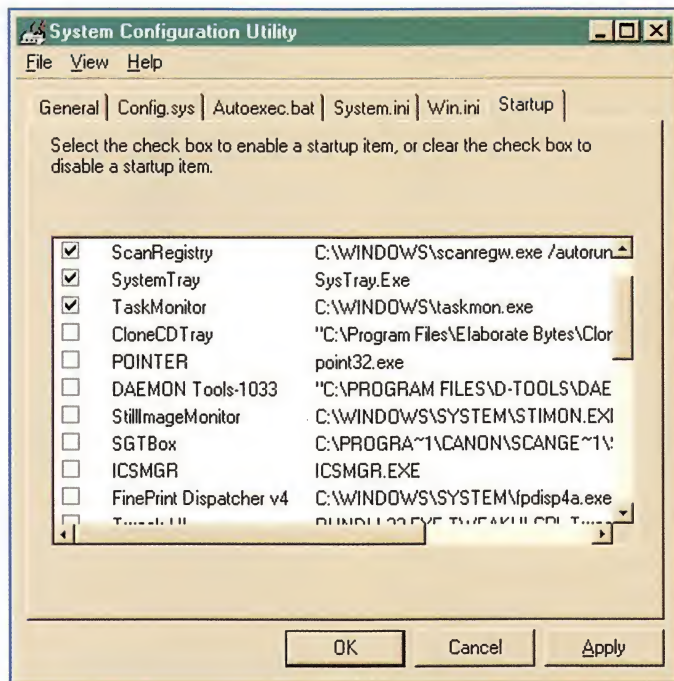
Hercules in Trouble

I recently bought a 32 MB AGP Hercules Prophet 4000 Video Card to replace my Voodoo 3 3000 card. The installation was successful but whenever I try to play a game my machine freezes up and I have to reset. The PC has also frozen up a couple of times at the desktop. I have tried 'all the usual things' to make it work (list supplied). I contacted Hercules support but have had no replies. The only thing that seems out of place is that the specs for the card say it needs an AGP 2 compliant MoBo. Now I know AGP 2 compliant isn't the same as AGP 1x 2x etc, so what is AGP 2 compliant? I have now reinstalled my Voodoo 3 3000 and everything works fine except the slightly degraded graphics. Any help would be appreciated (system specs supplied).

Slider

Facts are the Intel BX440 MoBo is only AGP 1.0 compliant while your new Video Card is AGP 2.0 compliant, so it looks like your MoBo can't handle it! If the Hercules documentation states that an AGP 2.0 MoBo is required, then it's probably not backwards compatible with 3.3V slots. AGP 1.0 operates in 1x and 2x modes and has a 3.3V keyed edge. AGP 2.0 operates in 1x/2x/4x modes and can be found in three edge-connection formats: 3.3V keyed, 1.5V keyed and AGP Universal which supports both voltages and keyed edges. It also means that a 1.5V card should not be placed in the 3.3V AGP 1.0 slot unless it is dual voltage!

Besides flaky video drivers, the chief cause of video



instability is the chipset. Try updating your chipset drivers, again, from here: <http://developer.intel.com/design/software/drivers/platform/inf.htm>

More info on AGP is available from <http://www.apgforum.org>. You might also be able to return the card stating that it isn't what you were told i.e. "compatible with your system".

System resources - NOT!

I like to run a reasonably clean system so I followed your advice some time ago and regularly use msconfig to disable the multitude of applications that just put themselves on the startup list. I disable anything that doesn't look important and leave most things. On startup, I hit Ctrl+Alt+Delete to see what's what and I generally only have Explorer, Systray and my Epson printer status check going with resources starting off at around 86%.

Over a period of about ten hours my resources start plummeting at a steady rate until there is only about 3% free and Windows pulls apart at the seams. This happens even though I have nothing extra running at this point. In between these times I would probably surf the net for a couple of hours, download, burn a few CDs and play a couple of games.

What's going on? I've been using this configuration for quite some time and it never used to lose resources just like that. I also find resources fall very quickly if I work with a lot of WinZip files. I can't leave my PC on for more than 12 hours without it killing itself! That's everything. It's really not much and allows system resources to start off at around 86%.

Toryu

Resource problems are a well documented Windows annoyance. Often, little can be done until the rogue application or process is identified and patched or removed. Some points to note:

Behaviour by Design. Windows defers most system initialisation until the first time a program asks for a particular service. If a program requests a service that uses deferred initialisation, the service remains initialised after the program has exited. The system resources associated with that service are not freed. The system keeps the service initialised so that the next program that requests the service does not have to wait for the service to be initialised. Microsoft states that this is by design for Win9x. For compatibility reasons, Windows

does not free the system resources abandoned by Win3.1 based programs until all Win3.1 based programs have been closed. Only when there are no Win3.1 based programs running can Windows safely release abandoned system resources.

Memory Leak. When you quit a program, the system resources that the program uses should be returned to the OS. However, some programs don't return all of these resources, effectively 'leaking' memory and this can create a low system-resource state (maybe AOL is doing this).

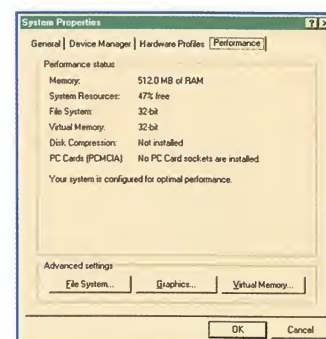
Insufficient RAM. This is hardly an issue now that memory is cheap and many people have upgraded their RAM. Insufficient CPU speed can also cause 'resource' problems.

Program Quit Before Starting. If you quit a program before it has completely finished starting, memory leak will occur and free system resources will decrease.

Troubleshooting. Here are some steps to identify 'memory-leakers':

1. Run MSconfig and uncheck all Startup entries except ScanReg, System Tray and Task Monitor
2. Reboot and don't manually start any programs
3. Right-click My Computer, click Properties and then click the Performance tab. Note the percentage that is next to System Resources
4. Start a program, use it for about 15 minutes and then quit
5. Check the resources level as per step three

If resources are substantially less than before starting the program, you may have a memory-leaker. Contact the developer of the program to ask

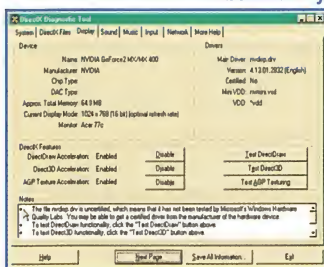


about a fix for this issue.

F-Troop

I had a letter published in PCPP #72 and you recommended the program FDISK. This came up with an error about NTFS and some other thing. Is there any way I can use FDISK to merge my HDD? After that, I tried to format my disk so I can install WinXP Home and I couldn't because some programs were still in use. So I installed WinXP on the D:\ drive and that worked. Then I tried to format C:\ again because I figured that WinXP would run from D:\. I got all the way to 99% on the format and then it said could not complete the format because "some programs are still in use". Is there any way I can format it?

bathtuboy



I hope you are attempting a FORMAT or FDISK in a pure DOS environment (using a boot floppy disk) and that you know that any attempt at FORMAT or FDISK will destroy any data on the chosen disks? That said, the best way to knock a disk over is to delete the partitions. Go here <http://support.microsoft.com/support/kb/articles/Q255/8/67.ASP> for detailed description and help. Other excellent sites are here <http://www.computerhope.com/fdiskhlp.htm> and <http://fdisk.radified.com>

My Network

I am running a local area network using Internet Computer Sharing (ICS) on WinMe linking three, sometimes four computers. The network had been operating fine for some time but now I want the fourth PC to use ICS and I can't. It has no dial-up adaptor and I cannot add one through Control Panel/Network.

In Control Panel/Network only Client, Protocol and Services are listed (this is common to all four computers), i.e. no Adaptors. Also in three of the four computers if, say, you want to add another Service, the Add button itself is enabled but when you click on it, the next screen which should display a list of available Services (or whatever) doesn't display - so you cannot add another Service, Client or Protocol!

This all used to work but somewhere along the line things have gone wrong. We tried building and adding a fifth (Win98SE) PC to the network but it had similar problems as well. Another thing, we used to network three computers using coaxial cable but a couple of months ago switched over to a hub. Have you heard of this type of problem and have you any suggestions other than rebuilding all the computers?

Gary Young

Yep, I know of the problem - sometimes Windows just won't play ball. This will be short, sharp and sweet because I'm assuming you know a bit about this anyway. A client PC doesn't need a dial up adaptor installed so I'm assuming you wanted the fourth PC to be the Host? My first piece of advice is to uninstall the entire network, save for the NICs, from Network Neighbourhood/My Network Places Properties. Uninstall DUN and ICS from the Windows Add/Remove Programs/Windows Setup tab at the same time - reboot. Then, start with the Host and install Client for Microsoft Networks but get the logon working first, then install TCP/IP. Leave IPX/SPX and NetBEUI until you can establish a local TCP/IP connection with the Clients. Create an ICS floppy for the Clients and use it to set them up. You can also check your DUN on the host by running "inetwiz" (without the quotes) and it will reinstall any missing files (have your WinMe disc ready if it's not loaded onto the disk). Check for all the bindings you need. Despite a plethora of 'how-

to' guides, simple networking and ICS can be hit and miss. Go to <http://www.practicallynetworked.com/howto/> for good help.

My New MoBo

I recently purchased a new MoBo, the MSI K7T266 Pro2-RU (256 MB DDR), it's being featured in the Beast played no small part in my choice, and I'm running my 40 GB disk on one of the RAID channels in order to free up the other IDE channels so I can run my burner and DVD drive independently to ensure the best bandwidth for burning. It works like a treat and I love the board except for one thing. Having the RAID channels enabled means that it goes through a slow drive detection process on every startup which in turn dramatically slows down the whole startup process. So I was just wondering if there was any way to disable the detection process and tell it to use the same settings as on the last startup and to only look for changes when I tell it to.



Sirius

The short answer is "not really". I looked at some other rigs and found that, depending on CPU, number of devices and RAM, the enumeration can take anywhere from 20 seconds to a minute. My ATA100 IDE card, with four optical devices, takes about 30 seconds. If I place a blank CD-R into one of the burners, it slows the enumeration right down to over a minute, as the IDE card's BIOS tries to work out what's going on. Might it work better if you only started or re-booted when you really had to?

Unfair!

I think my PC retailer may have gyped me on the CPU fan. On the invoice is listed a Thermaltake Volcano 6 fan which would have been fine, but in the box I've noticed it's actually a Thermaltake Chrome Orb fan. I've looked up the Thermaltake website and it does state that the Chrome Orb fan is OK for Athlon XP systems up to 1.5 GHz, but I don't know if this includes Athlon XP systems. Anyway, the fan does run at 5000 RPM but the CPU temp is consistently 60° C. Is this too hot?

Craig Smith

Take the PC back and discuss it with the store manager and owner if needed. AMD.com has a list of tested and recommended thermal solutions for their chips. The AMD stated 'max' temperature for an AMD Athlon XP is 100° C. Anything over 75° C needs a better thermal solution.

Want fries with that?

I just bought a SB Live! 5.1 which never worked and the guys at the shop say that it's because of my MoBo. I'm not sure what type it is but I have an AMD K6 II 300 MHz with 256 MB of SDRAM. I think it's SDRAM anyway. They say I have to upgrade my chip, MoBo and possibly the RAM because I want to get an Athlon 1.8 GHz or something like that. But the guy says that Athlons tend to fry themselves and that P4s are more reliable (and also at least 300 more dollars!) So I don't know what to do, if he's just trying to get more money out of me or what?

Chris

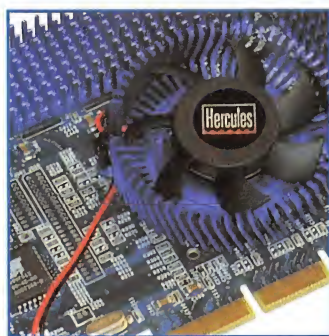
The guys have given you mostly honest advice. The SoundBlaster Live! has had some real issues of late varying from Windows software glitches to chipset driver incompatibilities (particularly VIA Southbridge data corruption) to plain old IRQ conflicts. There are many patches available at the Creative and Microsoft websites. Your RAM is OK as long as it's PC133, but judging by your CPU, I

SETUP

STUART CALVIN WAXES TECHNICAL

would recommend an upgrade to a new MoBo and chip, exactly what one depends on your budget, but an upgrade will do justice to your SB Live! Yes, Athlons run hotter compared to Intel chips but the Athlons don't really 'fry' themselves and, for gamers, remain the chip of choice for bang per buck.

I have a plain-jane DFI MoBo with a VIA chipset running an Athlon Thunderbird 1.4 GHz and it rOx! It idles at about 45-46°C and using an AMD recommended thermal solution (a heatsink and fan, duh!) I can't get it to go over 60°C. Street price for an AMD Athlon XP 1700 and fan is about \$285 and a MoBo to suit, say, an MSI-K7T 266PRO-2 RAID is about \$260. Buy these at a PC Fair and you're probably looking at less than \$525 for an upgrade to heaven. The Intel alternative is a P3 1.26 GHz for, aww gee, \$490! That's more than a P4 1.8 GHz socket 478 for \$470! Hmm, you could buy the AMD solution and use the savings to get those digital speakers you really, really need...



Win XP (eXtra probs)

I have recently bought WinXP (Home Full Version and Professional Upgrade Version). I have had them for a few months now and I must congratulate them on their fabulous work, but I have found a major fault (eXtra problems). Half of the programs I run on the damn OS don't work, damnit! and even some of the applications which come with it are stuffed like Internet Explorer! I'll get straight to the point. Whenever I try to scroll down a web page it's very jerky! This is

terrible! I use IE heaps and don't appreciate it when I can't do my things in peace without something going silly. Is there a fix for this or is it just one of Microsoft's many bugs?

I've also recently gone through ALL of my old PCPP CDs from PCPP#42 onwards and ended up chewing up a load of space installing around.

Dominik Mikula

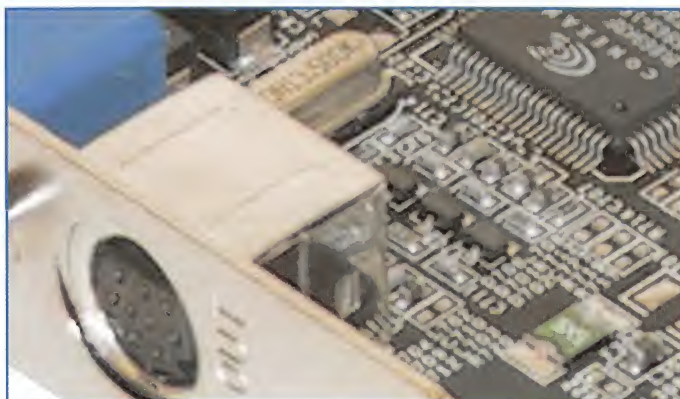
I can understand your problems if you you're trying to do this with a relatively slow CPU and minimal RAM. My XP test box (so I can still relate to the real world!) is a PII 350 MHz on an ABIT BE6, with 128MB RAM and things just hum along fine. Max Payne is a bit of drag and I can have a coffee in between mouse moves in UT sometimes but it doesn't have the problems you describe. Although, trying to play Jill of the Jungle or Asteroids would be a snowball's trip to hell unless you setup your older software to run in compatibility mode. If your PC specs are better than my test box, then get back to me with your system specs (which are always nice to have). If they're a little worse than mine, then think about an upgrade of your PC ;)

USB 2.0 or Not 2.0

Hi, I was thinking about what I really want for my PC. I would like a scanner, printer and a digital camera. Should I wait for USB 2.0 to be more widely adopted (I'm in no hurry) or should I just get USB 1.1 peripherals? Will USB 2.0 offer much of a performance boost over USB 1.1? If I have USB 1.1 and 2 peripherals plugged into a USB 2.0 card at the same time will the USB 2.0 peripherals get delegated to 12 Mb/s or will the USB 2.0 peripherals work at the full 480 Mb/s. Can I use my existing USB 1.1 ports at the same time as the USB 2.0 card? Please help as I'm in a terrible pickle.

Ben Halpin

USB is appropriate for slow speed devices like audio,



scanners, printers, keyboards, and mice. It's not really suitable for streaming or moving digital images and barely suitable for CD writing given recent test results. Moreover, Microsoft will not provide USB 2.0 support for Win9x or NT so you'll need to upgrade your OS to take advantage of the increased interface throughput. USB 2.0 drivers are now available for WinXP through Windows Update, but support for Win2K is still under development. Third party vendors will supply USB 2.0 drivers with their hardware but I think that's shaky ground because Microsoft will not be offering the developer support critical for success. USB 1.1, for example, will limit a USB 2.0 compatible burner to as low as 4x write, 4x rewrite and 6x read speeds and take forever to transfer digital images. USB 1.1 and 2.0 can coexist in much the same way that IEEE-1394 FireWire and USB can coexist. USB 1.0 is fine for slow speed devices as I described and USB 2.0 will produce noticeable speed differences over USB 1.1 but I recommend FireWire for digital peripherals such as video and still cameras. For futureproofing, there's more to be gained by using FireWire. If you need to stay with Win98 then by all means use USB 1.0 but consider FireWire for your digital and high speed work.

What about the Warranty?

I purchased a new PC recently and it was running fine for about three hours after I got home, then I installed Deus Ex. It

installed but crashed to the desktop after I played for two minutes. The problem then became that when I would try to do anything, the blue screen of death would come up about an error in VXD and VFAT.

I formatted the HDD thinking that it would solve my problem but when I reinstalled Windows the BSOD came back every time I tried to install something other than drivers. Now the problem has evolved. The PC sometimes randomly goes to a BSOD when I click on My Computer saying something about an error in VXD VCACHE. Other times the PC freezes while installing Windows after a format, sometimes when trying to boot up it encounters a Windows protection error and says that I must restart the PC. Most of the time when I reinstall Windows it gets to configuring my system, time zone and all of that, and when it's about to finish configuring the system it gets the blue screen blues and I have to restart because it freezes. It always freezes after a BSOD. When I restart and continue installing Windows it gets through it fine most times without a second error.

My PC is a Duron 1 GHz and GeForce2 MX200. I am 'trying' to use Win98SE. I have asked others and they all say different things. Some say that the problem is in the virtual memory. Others say that the file allocation table is the problem. My IT teacher said that the problem is that a .vxd file can't load when I boot up and that I should look at the boot log and change that file

to .old. I'm being deprived of my gaming goodness.

Rory Byrn

The PC ran fine for three hours but every time you try and install something, it won't work? It blue-screens, freezes and is generally useless? This fits the description of 'not fit for purpose' under the Fair Trading Act. It doesn't matter what's wrong with it, it's not your problem! I suspect that the disk is damaged and/or the RAM is incompatible with the MoBo but for goodness sake, take it back!

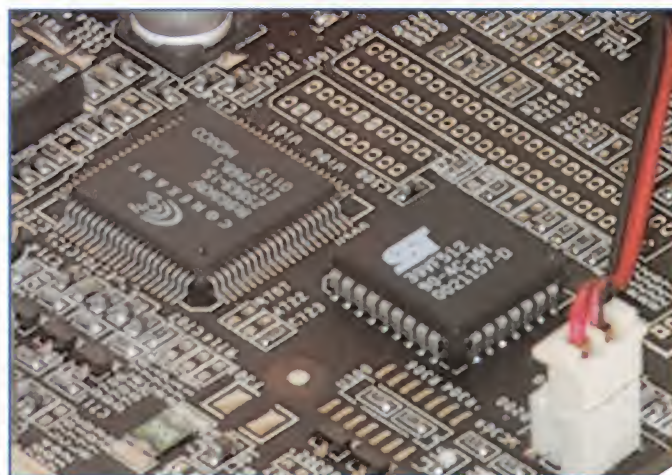
Some Advice

Setup's advice is a bit hard kore - not every MoBo with on-board video is junk. It's junk if it has no AGP slot. Many all-in-one boards have an AGP slot, so it's a matter of disabling the on-board video in BIOS and putting in a graphics card. OK, it may not be an Asus but with a good Video Card it doesn't matter too much. Games need roughly 50% from the Video Card, 35% from the processor, and 15% from everything else (so long as you have at least 128 MB RAM). My advice when buying a PC is to start at the video card and put everything else at a lower priority. That way you won't end

up with a board with no AGP slot. I think upgrading your Video Card is the way to get a sure-fire performance increase. It would be interesting if PCPP put a GeForce3 into the Beastie and benchmark both the Beastie and the Beast. I reckon there wouldn't be much in it. As the benchmarks are not printed now, I wonder what the real speed difference is and if it's worth \$10,000.

jcve

Thanks for your letter. I've got to say that if you want to use an AGP card then why purchase a MoBo with on-board video in the first place? You're not only paying for something you won't use but we know that nearly all integrated solutions are a compromise. I disagree with the Video Card being the first priority, surely the MoBo, CPU, RAM and Video Card are the determining factors for overall system performance? There's little point in matching an S3 Virge 1MB Video Card with an MSI K7T266 Pro2-RU. Likewise I see little point in powering something like the Beast with a low-end Duron and it would be most unhappy with only 64 MB of RAM. I use these extreme



examples to highlight the relationship for overall performance. For gamers, the overall 'fit' is the key. You can do a little futureproofing with individual components like purchasing an ATA133 160GB disk or the latest and greatest Video Card when you anticipate upgrading in the near future. System components have to compliment each other but I don't see one component as the absolute key to any retail system.

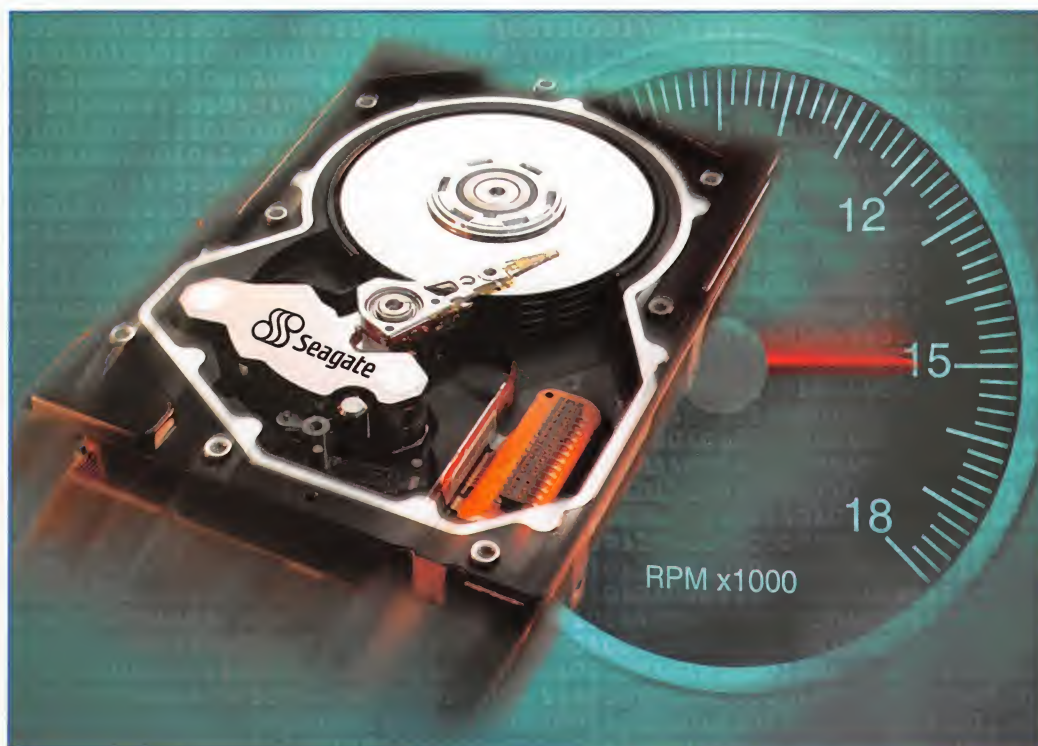
InDirectX!

I install DirectX 8.1 (PCPP#72 CD) and everything seems OK, but all of a sudden most of my games

stop working. So I go into DirectX diagnostic and when I test Direct3D it doesn't test DirectX 8 capabilities. It just doesn't work. It won't do the test. When it finishes the DirectX 7 hardware accelerated capabilities I usually have to restart the PC because it goes to a white screen and no further. I am using a TNT2 M64 card with the latest Detonator drivers for Win98 which came on the CD with PCPP#72. I am desperate to get back to gaming.

Wingzerokai

A known Windows annoyance is a DirectX installation that doesn't really install that well. The trick is to re-install DirectX again (and again if necessary!) and then check for uncertified drivers in the DirectX Diagnostic program. Normally these uncertified drivers present no problems, I have several on my PC, but you may have hit the wall in this case. Check your peripheral card manufacturers' websites for updated drivers. As an aside, the TNT2 M64 Video Card is getting to the point where 3D games may not be fun anymore. I found that the GeForce2 400MX card was an ideal upgrade from the M64 and similarly, a GeForce4 440MX is an ideal upgrade from a 400MX - I have all three cards and have experienced the problem you describe - just persevere.



THE BEAST

THE MOST POWERFUL GAMING PC GOOD MONEY CAN BUY

In this month's Beast we rip out its motherboard and replace it with a nice new shiny Abit AT7 and contemplate the possibility of 12 IDE 80GB IDE devices. That's 960GB - only 40GB off a Terrabyte. The addition of the APC ES 350 also ensures that "The Beast" shall never become a power-surged melted mass of silicon - ever.

CPU, MEMORY AND MOTHERBOARD

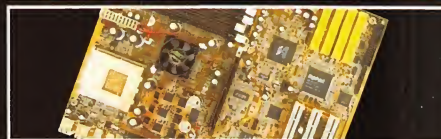
AMD Athlon XP 2100+

66Mhz faster than the XP2000+, the 2100+ produces the kind of performance required to satiate "The Beast".
\$695 www.perplus.com.au 1 800 007 587



Abit AT7 KT333

Boasting 2x USB 2.0, 2x Firewire, 100mbps Realtek ethernet adapter, 4 channel ATA133 RAID and 2 channel ATA133, as feature rich as it is desirable. \$380 www.abit.com.tw



1Gb Kingmax 333MHz DDR RAM

This memory runs fast enough to part your hair and 1 gig of it is enough to ensure that even the most memory hungry game will run stutter free.
\$800 www.techbuy.com.au 1 300 368 238



Thermaltake Volcano 7

Ironically named, the Thermaltake onboard variable speed fan knows just how fast it needs to spin to keep your CPU running optimally cool.
\$57 www.anyware.com.au (02) 9879 5788



Topower 420w PSU

With 420W of power output the Topower can reliably power as many devices as you can fit in your case. The perfect partner for the AT7
\$182 www.techbuy.com.au 1 300 368 238



VIDEO SUBSYSTEM AND AUDIO

ASUS V8460 Ultra

With twin vertex and pixel shaders, 128Mb RAM, 4.8 Billion AA Samples/Sec fill rate and performing 1.23 trillion ops per second
\$890 www.compuparts.com.au (02) 9482 2582



Creative Audigy Platinum XP

With the ability to process 4 simultaneous EAX effects and sound quality so clear you can hear the difference
\$599 www.creative.com.au (02) 9666 6500



BA Digital Theatre 7000

There's no point in having the best sound card in the world if you hook it up to substandard speakers. So get these.
\$1399 www.bostonacoustics.com (02) 9319 6877



Sony MDR-F1 Headphones

For those times when it's not appropriate to have your volume so loud the walls shake and your gut aches.
\$649 www.sony.com.au 1300 137 669



APC Back UPS ES 350

The beast is more than a PC - it's an investment! Protect your expensive components and never lose unsaved work again.
\$262 asia.apccjpaa.com/au 1800 652 725



LATEST ADDITION

APC Back UPS ES 350

Asia.apccjpaa.com/au 1 800 652 725

The latest addition for this month is the APC UPS ES 350. The first consumer size UPS, the ES 350 will also protect all modems (ADSL and standard) from surge protection down the phone line. With 6 - 11 mins of rechargeable battery life and USB support for unattended shutdown, it's essential power protection for the Beast.



STORAGE AND OPTICAL

Acer CRW-2012A CD-RW

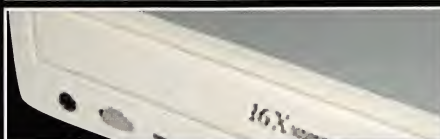
40 times write and 48 times read makes this CD-RW an essential archiving tool for The Beast. Tasty!

\$205 www.achieva.com.au (02) 9742 3288

**Panasonic SR-8586 B 16x DVD-ROM**

Fast reliable and able to read DVD this drive is a must for those that want to exploit the 4GB+ PC PowerPlay DVD edition.

\$180 www.panasonic.com.au (02) 9555 9777

**Seagate Cheetah 73LP 73GB HDD**

Almost as much as "The Beastie" this 10,000 RPM hard disk was the first to break the 50MB a second barrier.

\$1980 www.seagate.com.au (02) 9742 3288

**Panasonic 3.5" Floppy**

For those times when you haven't got a Boot CD the 3.5" floppy is invaluable. Also handy for transferring files via the old "sneaker-net" method.

\$25 www.gamedude.com.au (07) 3841 5144

**Adaptec 29160 SCSI**

Whether you need to connect a SCSI HDD, tape backup unit or external SCSI device, Adaptec have been number 1 since the late eighties.

\$529 www.adaptec.com (02) 9416 0687



PHYSICALITY AND INPUT

Diamondtron 2060u 22" Monitor

Big, Beautiful and with image quality so clear that after hours of playing your eyes will serenely thank you, rather than ache unappreciatively.

\$2099 www.mitsubishi-electric.com.au (02) 9684 7777

**Lian Li PC-60 ATX Aluminium Case**

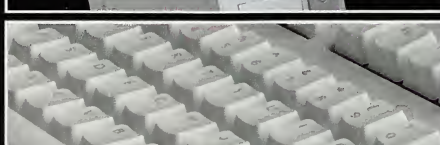
Proudly aluminium this case is large, spacious and delightfully smooth. You won't shred your hands on razor sharp edges!

\$396 www.anyare.com.au (02) 9879 5788

**Microsoft Internet Keyboard**

Handy little blue "Internet buttons" extends the functionality of a conventional keyboard and a moulded integrated palm rest make this a winner.

\$49 www.gamedude.com.au (07) 3841 5144

**Logitech Mouseman Dual Optical**

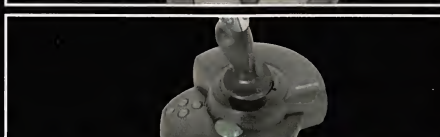
Super accurate, this mouse won't let you down where you need it most - duelling online of course.

\$99.95 www.logitech.com (02)9972 3711

**Microsoft Sidewinder Force-Feedback**

Excellent accuracy and strong force feedback effects make the Sidewinder an essential joystick for flight and space sims.

\$199 www.microsoft.com 132 058

**Logitech Momo Force**

The same wheel found in sport cars around the world available for your PC. Fuzzy dice optional.

\$499 www.logitech.com (02) 9972 3711



**TOTAL BEAST
VALUE: \$12218**

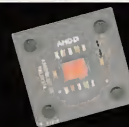


BEASTIE

Athlon XP 1600

Fast but inexpensive. Just how the Beastie likes it.

\$279

**512Mb Kingston DDR RAM**

Half a Gig, Half a Gig, Half a Gig. Need we say more?

\$265

**Abit KR7A**

Full legacy support, dual channel raid and onboard ethernet.

\$300

**40GB Seagate Barracuda Series**

7200 RPM and 40GB of storage for a tiny price.

\$189

**Sony 16x DVD ROM**

CD is dead. Long live DVD

\$129

**ASUS V8170 DDR**

The GeForce4 MX440 lacks only the vertex and pixel shading of the GeForce4.

\$231

**Hercules Muse XL**

Clear, loud and EAX 1 and 2 compatible. Affordable surround sound.

\$46

**Samsung 753DF**

A 17" monitor that's clear and reliable.

\$469

**Aopen HQ45 PRO**

USB ports up front, a 300W/250V power supply, three 5.25" bays, two 3.5" bays and a full metal chassis

\$132

**Hercules XPS 210**

A great sounding sub and satellite speaker combo that also looks good.

\$119



**TOTAL BEASTIE
VALUE: \$2158**

ORACLE

Write to the Oracle at:

The Oracle
PC PowerPlay
78 Renwick St
Redfern
NSW 2016

oracle@pcpowerplay.com.au

His pilgrimage over, a lone robed figure emerges from the mist, a vast gaming wasteland behind him. Slowly lowering his hood you see a pasty white face grin slyly, revealing stained yellow teeth. The Oracle has returned and once again is ready to answer all your gaming questions.

JK II - Jedi Outcast

Reelo's hideout

Help me PCPP, you're my only hope! I am stuck in Jedi Knight on the Nar Shaddaa - Reelo's hideout mission. I have explored the area but can't see where to go next.

Wade
Hornsby, NSW

Ah young Jedi, 'tis JKII's first real challenge that you find yourself trapped in, but fear not! For fear leads to the dark side and besides, I've got your answer. Start by going to the area where the garbage smashers are and find the one with the pipe sticking out of its side. Jump onto the pipe then up and into the garbage smasher and carefully run under the smashing mechanism so as not to get squashed.

Continue down the corridor until you enter a large room and

solve the simple jumping puzzle. Now use Force Pull to get the box out of your way and jump up. Follow the path to a bridge and go across then go down the ramp and use Force Pull on the dumpster.

Retrace your steps and go back across the bridge to the ledge in the corner and drop down onto some crates. Return to the main area (where the four smashers are) and enter the room with the crate that brings up the blue swirling icon informing you that Force powers can be used on the object. Use Force Pull to move the crate towards you and crawl through the revealed passageway which will lead you to another garbage hauler. Use Force Push to move the dumpster, enter the new corridor and continue.



Medal of Honour - AA

Omaha Beach Level

MEDIC!! I need your help PCPP allies. Every time I get off the amphibious transport I am cut to shreds in seconds. What can I do to get through this impossible level?

Thomas M,
Rowville, Vic

The Omaha Beach level, a masterful achievement in atmosphere and gameplay which actually isn't too hard to complete once you know it. Here's how to do it. The captain gives the signal, the doors burst open and thousands of rounds of ammunition whiz right by you. Immediately run behind the barricade just ahead. Although made from wood and scrap steel, as long as you stay behind a barricade you will be safe. Listen to the machine gun sounds as bullets hit the water and the barricades near you. As soon as you move you will be fired on which will last for approximately ten seconds after you hide behind a barricade again. The trick is to move and hide, wait for the machine gun fire to die down and move again.

From your position behind the first barricade, run to the right and hide behind the wooden tripod barricade. When the firing dies down move forward to the next barricade just ahead. Now move to the right side again and up to the next barricade, putting you almost on the beach. When appropriate, run to the next barrier ahead of you on the beach. Note: When on the



beach you will need to crouch behind barricades to be protected by them.

Scan around for a medic saving a soldier in front of you and to your left. When safe, run and take cover behind him and he will heal you for 50 health. Look to your left and move to the three barricades nearby. Run to the middle one then move to the one nearby on the right.

By this stage you should be halfway up the beach and taking mortar fire. There is only one safe time to move past the explosions and that's after an NPC yells get down! Which is the signal for a round of mortars. As soon as the bombing stops run up to the next barricade. Continue to the barricade to your right and look for craters in the ground. When possible, run into the crater to the right and crouch. Now use the three barricades between this crater and the other one on your left and crouch into it. Finally, when it's safe, get out of the crater and quickly run up to the shingle.

Klingon Academy

Mission 7

Can you please help? I am stuck on Mission 7 in Klingon Academy. Every time I try to destroy the cargo ship it warps into some stupid planet.

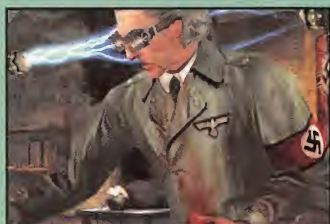
**Justin S.
Tuggerah, NSW**

As is the case with these kinds of games it's very difficult to post specific advice given how the AI will react differently each time. Instead what I'll do is take you through the whole mission.



CODE

The Oracle shows you how to squeeze out every ounce of gaming goodness from your favourites.



Return to Castle Wolfenstein

To use these cheats you will need to modify the shortcut on your desktop. Right click it and select properties, then change the "target" line by adding the following:

+ set sv_cheats 1

After you have done that click OK, then start the game using the desktop shortcut.

For the cheats to work you must load any saved game, or start a game and save it then reload it. Once in game press the tilde key (~) to bring up the console and you will then be able to add any number of the below cheats.

/god - god mode

/notarget - enemies will not fire at you

/noclip - walk thru walls

/giveall - all weapons

/give luger - Gives luger

/give colt - Gives Colt .45

/give dual colts - Gives you dual Colts.

/give mp40 - Gives MP40

/give thompson - Gives Thompson

submachinegun

/give sten - Gives Sten

/give mauser rifle - Gives you

Mauser Rifle

/give sniper scope - Gives Sniper's

Scope for Mauser

/give snoop rifle - Gives you

Snooper Rifle

/give fg42 paratroop rifle - Gives

FG42 Paratroop Rifle

/give grenade - Gives 1 potato

masher grenade

/give grenades - Gives 3 of above

/give pineapple - Gives 1

pineapple grenade

/give pineapples - Gives 3 of the

above

/give panzerfaust - Gives

panzerfaust

/give venom - Gives Venom gun

/give flamethrower - Gives

flamethrower

/give tesla gun - Gives Tesla Gun

/give 9mm - Gives you 32 9mm

rounds (MP40, Sten)

/give 9mm rounds - Gives you 16

9mm rounds

/give 9mm box - Gives you (40?)

9mm rounds

/give 7.92mm - Gives you 16

7.92mm rounds (Mauser, FG42)

/give 7.92mm rounds - Gives you 8

7.92mm rounds

/give .45 cal - Gives you (15?) .45

cal rounds (Thompson, Colt)

/give .45 cal box - Gives you 30

.45 cal rounds

/give .30 cal - Gives you 5 .30 cal

rounds (Snooper)

/give .30 cal box - Gives you 10

.30 cal rounds

/give 12.7mm - Gives you 50

12.7mm rounds (Venom)

/give fuel - Gives you 50 fuel

/give cell - Gives you 50 cells

/give armor X - X is the amount of

armor you want. By default it gives you 100

/give health X - X is the amount of health you want. By default 100.

/give binoculars - Gives you

binoculars.

/give ammo - Gives 999 ammo

/nofatigue - Unlimited Sprint

To access maps type

/spdevmap [map]

[map] is one of the below values

from the map table. For example

to access the Tram Ride Map I

would type /spdevmap tram

Mission 1: Ominous Rumors

Escape! = escape1

Castle Keep = escape2

Tram Ride = tram

Mission 2: Dark Secrets

Village = village1

Catacombs = crypt1

Crypt= crypt2

The Defiled Church = church

The Defiled Church Boss = boss1

Mission 3: Weapons of Vengeance

Forest Compound = forest

Rocket Base = rocket

Radar Installation = baseout

Air Base Assault = assault

Mission 4: Deadly Design

Kugelstadt = smf

The Bombed Factory = factory

The Trainyards = trainyards

Secret Weapons Facility = swf

Mission 5: Deathshead's Playground

Ice Station Norway = norway

X-Labs = x-labs

Super Soldier = boss2

Mission 6: Return Engagement

Bramburg Dam = dam

Paderborn Village = village2

Chateau Schuftaffel = chateau

Unhallowed Ground = dark

Mission 7: Operation Resurrection

The Dig = dig

Return to Castle Wolfenstein = castle

Heinrich = end

Dungeon Siege

While playing, press enter and type:

+zool - Invincible

+chunky - Always chunky

+superchunky - Chunk Factor

+version - Game version

+drdeath - +150 of everything

+shootall - No longer need to click

+sixdemonbag - Gain six powerful

summoning spells

+loefervision - No fog

+xrayvision - No textures

+minjooky - Character very small

+maxjooky - Character very big -

Caution!

+checksinthemail - 9,999,999 gold

+sniper - Gives all weapons 100

meter range

+ - Turns cheats on

- - Turns cheats off

ORACLE



When you start the mission have your two escorts form up, cloak and head for Sommes. Once you enter the system have your escorts stay on your wing and cycle through your targets until you find the 800 FRT class freighter. Scan it and your comms officer will tell you that its database can be hacked and information retrieved. Take note that you need to destroy the comm relay to cause the sensor net on Ypres III to attack enemy and friendly craft (as well as itself). Wait about ten seconds then warp to target. As soon as you arrive have your escorts attack the freighter and try to destroy it as quickly as possible and just ignore enemy starships. Chances are you won't be able to kill the freighter fast enough and it will warp into a gas giant. At this point the only thing you can do is chase it in there.

Upon entering the gas giant make sure you keep your speed between 100km/s and 1/4 impulse by using 2-4-4 then the [key to drop your speed back a bit. Set damage control to max, disable your security and weapons, and bring your sensors up to 20%. Once the ship is in range, destroy it. Hit the S key often to see where you are and the status of other ships. With the ship destroyed, the best way to leave the gas giant is to target the next

planetary body (moon or planet) and head towards that until you break free from the atmosphere.

Warp to Ypres III and destroy the communication satellite. It should be the very first target that appears after hitting the S key. If not, use your VOS to target all and then keep cycling until you find it. Move up to it (within 1500km) and then uncloak. Open fire and two shots should handle the satellite. Immediately cloak and go back away from the satellite and all the satellites will start firing at one another.

With the satellites destroyed at least one Universal DN class starship should appear and could possibly have a Miranda-class escort. If you only have to fight the Universal DN-class ship, fight is as you would normally but increase damage control to 40%. If both ships show up order your escorts to fire on the Miranda CL-class craft while you remain cloaked and avoid any confrontation with the Universal DN-craft until the Miranda CL is destroyed. Once the ships are destroyed target Ypres III with either your F key or using 8-1 on VOS. Then, using 8-2 on VOS select your subsystem (all of the targets EXCEPT the Terran plant are to be destroyed) and a red square should show up somewhere on your planet's

subsystem. From this point keep your damage control up and destroy all the planetary targets. Once this is done warp back to Resten and your mission will be accomplished.

Baldur's Gate Killing Candlekeep

I am almost at the end of Baldur's Gate in Candlekeep and have learnt about Sarevok but don't know what to do next. Where is he so I can kill him and finally finish this game?

**Timothy N
Geraldton, WA**

Starting from the beginning of Chapter Seven here's how to

complete Baldur's Gate. Head SE around the walls of Candlekeep and exit the map on the right side. First, find an inn and when you rest you will have another dream and gain another special ability. Head back to the Iron Throne HQ again and to the very top level again. Kill the woman and the monsters she summons. Exit the Iron Throne HQ and find a Flaming Fist soldier. Allow him to arrest you and be taken to the Flaming Fist HQ where you talk to Angelo, the new leader. Beg him to let you go and he will not kill any of your party members, but he still sentences you to death and imprisons you.

Once imprisoned, talk to Neb repeatedly until he gives you a riddle. The answer is 33 children. He will then show you a tunnel you can use to escape to the outside. Re-enter the Flaming Fist HQ and kill the guards. Go up the stairs and talk to Kent who will reveal the truth about Rashad the healer. Go into the SE room and kill Rashad. If you like, you can take Eltan to the harbourmaster's house to gain 2500 XP. Either way, exit the Flaming Fist and head once again for the Iron Throne HQ.

Enter the Iron Throne HQ and walk to the SE corner of the main floor. Go down the stairs. Either try to get around the guard or kill him, it doesn't matter. Go through the door in the SE corner of this room and head into the sewers.



On the first sewer level, head SE straight down the main tunnel and go through the passage at the end. Kill any Rat Kind you encounter.

In the next area you will come upon Ratchild's clan of kobolds. They are surprisingly dangerous so don't be fooled! Walk around until you find the two assassins. Kill them and take their items, ESPECIALLY the invitation, which you will need to finish the game.

Now go to the surface and head for the north section of the city. At the front gate of the Duchal Palace show the guard your invitation and you will be permitted to enter. Inside, show your invitation again and go through the NE door into the main chamber. Your presence will start the ceremony. Once the "noblemen" start arguing, they will all turn into doppelgangers and attack your party. Kill them and attack Sarevok. He will teleport away and Belt will teleport you to the Thieves' Guild after him. Once there go down the stairs and enter the maze. Follow the path, but use your rogue to scout first as the area is very trap heavy. Eventually you'll come to a door which will lead to a ruined underground city. Enter the city and confront Rahvin and his gang of monsters who you must kill.

You're almost there now. Continue on and you will encounter the girl that begged you not to kill Sarevok. As seems to be the way in Baldurs Gate, she also will try and kill you. Dispatch her and enter the house just to the north.

Once inside DO NOT walk on the large skull emblem in the middle of the room! It triggers a whole bunch of traps! Also try to have a series of fire resist potions available as one of the goons has exploding arrows as well as the traps causing fire damage. Walk around the skull and confront Sarevok. When Sarevok attacks, focus your attack on him, not his goons. When Sarevok dies, the game is over and your quest is complete. Congratulations!

CODE

Ghost Recon

Press NUMBEPAD ENTER (the one in the bottom-right corner of the keyboard) to bring up the Console Window. Type the following cheats in and press ENTER to turn on the cheat you desire to use.

God Mode = superman
Team God Mode = teamsuperman
Infinite Ammo = ammo
All Items = refill
Win Mission = autowin
Invisibility = shadow
Team Invisibility = teamshadow
Move Faster = run
Capture Enemy Base = rock
Commit Suicide = god
Chicken Grenades = chickenrun
Paintball Mode = extremepaintball

In the main Ghost Recon

Directory there is a XML document named unlocked_missions.xml and inside this file it lists all the missions you have unlocked. All you have to do is open the source code, erase everything and enter the following text to access all missions.

<UnlockedMissions>

```
<Mission>m01_caves.mis</Mission>
<Mission>m02_farm.mis</Mission>
<Mission>m03_rrbridge.mis</Mission>
<Mission>m04_village.mis</Mission>
<Mission>m05_embassy.mis</Mission>
<Mission>m06_castle.mis</Mission>
<Mission>m07_river.mis</Mission>
<Mission>m08_battlefield.mis</Mission>
<Mission>m09_swamp.mis</Mission>
<Mission>m10_ruined_city.mis</Mission>
<Mission>m11_pow_camp.mis</Mission>
<Mission>m12_docks.mis</Mission>
<Mission>m13_airbase.mis</Mission>
```

```
<Mission>m14_mountain.mis</Mission>
<Mission>m15_red_square.mis</Mission>
</UnlockedMissions>
```

In the main Ghost Recon directory, there is a file called "unlocked_heroes.xml". Open this file with an editing program and replace the existing text. Save the file, and you should have access to all the specialists.

```
<UnlockedHeroes>
<Hero>henry_ramirez.atr</Hero>
<Hero>nigel_tunney.atr</Hero>
<Hero>will_jacobs.atr</Hero>
<Hero>jack_stone.atr</Hero>
<Hero>guram_osadze.atr</Hero>
<Hero>susan_grey.atr</Hero>
<Hero>klaus_henkel.atr</Hero>
<Hero>buzz_gordon.atr</Hero>
<Hero>lindy_cohen.atr</Hero>
<Hero>astra_galinsky.atr</Hero>
<Hero>scott_ibrahim.atr</Hero>
<Hero>dieter_munz.atr</Hero>
</UnlockedHeroes>
```



Max Payne

To gain access to the cheats edit the game shortcut so it reads the following:
"C:\<LOCATION OF GAME>Maxpayne.exe - developer"

From within the game, you are then able to bring up the console using the F12 key. With the console on the screen type in the below commands to access the cheats.

God
Mortal
NoClip
NoClip_off
ShowFPS

To get individual weapons within the game, enter the following commands.

```
GetAllWeapons
GetBaseballbat
GetBeretta
GetBerettadual
GetbulletTime
GetColtCommando
GetGrenade
GetHealth
GetInfiniteAmmo
GetIngram
GetIngramDual
GetJackhammer
GetM79
GetMolotov
GetMP5
GetPainkillers
GetSawedShotgun
GetSniper
GetPumpShotgun
```



Bridge Commander

To activate Cheat Mode, go to the shortcut for the game (like the one on the desktop). Right-click it and go to 'Properties'. Click on the Shortcut tab, and go to the very end of the shortcut path. OUTSIDE the quote marks, enter a space and then enter "-TestMode" (without quotes). Use this shortcut to enter the game. In the game, the 'Quick Battle' button is replaced with 'Test Only'. Click this to go to any level in the game.

Also, whenever you're in-game, you can go to tactical display mode and use the following list of cheats.

Shift-G - God Mode (will display "GOD MODE" in the upper-right corner of screen when active)
Shift-K - Damage targeted subsystem by 25%
Shift-R - Completely repair target (Useful for when an ally ship gets pounded)
Shift-Q - Gain 10 Quantum Torpedoes (If you can carry them)

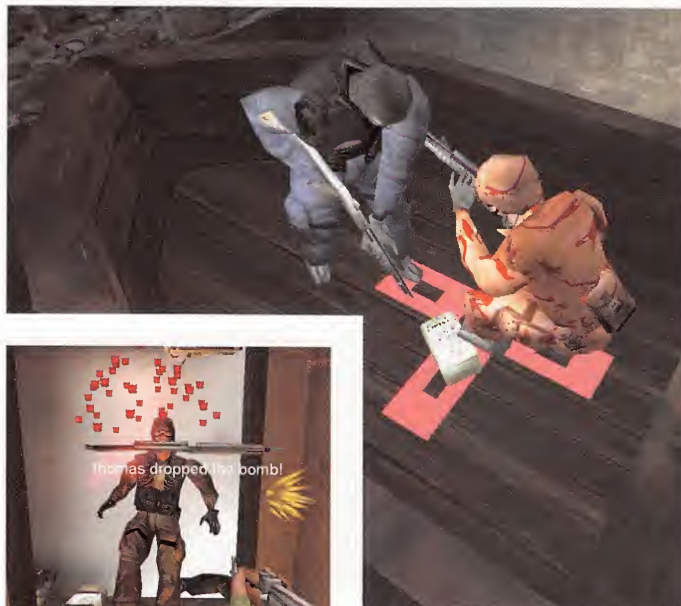
Mod Life

When out of the box just ain't enough

Unreal Tournament: Tactical Ops 2.2.0 Beta

With the ever increasing popularity of realistic combat simulation style games and mods being released on an already quite full market, it's nice to see that the standards of many of these mods are becoming more and more professional in feel and look. Tactical Ops for Unreal Tournament is such a mod. When joining a server, players can choose to play either a Terrorist or member of SWAT. Much like as in Counter-Strike the goal of the Terrorist Team is to place a bomb and ensure that it isn't disarmed. The SWAT team needs to stop them from carrying out their task. Due to the nature of the mod, comparisons to Counter-Strike are inevitable but Tactical Ops can happily stand on its own merits.

Unlike many other realistic combat games that have set about to model every modern weapon they can think of giving players the choice to use any gun they can think of, Tactical Ops has opted to keep the number of weapons relatively small. To make up for the limited selection, all of the models and skins are absolutely top notch with



animations to match. The balance of the weapons between the two teams is excellent with comparable damage and accuracy schemes. Likewise the player skins and animations are superb and look nothing but a truly professional job.

To add to the overall package all of the maps are well designed with clever choke points, hiding places and logically placed spawn points. Area ranges from the icy wilderness of Canada to deserted

factories and smelters. Aside from the basic demolitions game, some maps have a play mode called OICW. A new weapons system, the OICW (a real experimental assault rifle) is available and both teams must fight for possession. OICW plays somewhat like capture the flag with a far more militaristic intent. Tactical Ops is without a doubt one of the most professional mods available for download at the moment.



5/5

For: Unreal Tournament

Version: 2.2.0 Beta

Size: 115Mb

URL: www.tactical-ops.to/

For: Half Life

Half-Life: Earth Sp Forces

Although the actual download may not seem too big, Earth Special Forces for Half-Life is a truly comprehensive mod, modifying the Half-Life engine into a very faithful representation of Dragon Ball-Z. Players take the roles of characters from the incredibly popular anime and battle their way over numerous anime inspired maps.

4/5



For: N/A

Nethack 3.4.0

The greatest freeware game of all time just got a little better with the release of version 3.4.0. More items, better inventory, numerous bug fixes and a heap of little tweaks, add up to make one sweet little download. It's only about 1Mb all up so you've got nothing to lose giving it a try.

5/5

Quake 3 Arena: Quake 3 Fortress 2

Everybody should by now be familiar with the concept of Fortress style games - multiplayer games putting the emphasis on team work through the implementation of different character classes with compatible skills and abilities. A while back we reviewed Quake 3 Fortress, a hefty mod which added a number of different skills and characters to the game of Quake 3 Arena. We loved it. The good news is that Quake 3 Fortress 2 has recently been released and it's far better than its already impressive predecessor is. This time around the mod features: ten character classes, 21 maps, 16 weapons, eight grenades and more fun than you can poke a well rendered stick at.

Here's a look at some of the goodies you'll get to play with. New character classes include Recon, Sniper, Soldier, Grenadier, Paramedic, Minigunner, Flametrooper, Agent and Engineer, each of which has a specific skill-set. Recon characters are fast. Agents can become invisible for a short while or disguise themselves as the enemy. Engineers can use



demolitions and place sentry guns. Minigunners have really big guns and the heaviest armour, but at the cost of maneuverability. I'm sure you get the picture by now. In a later release the programmers are hoping to include a civilian class with no weapons or armour, only wits and team-mates but until then the standard 10 will have to be enough. All of the characters are well-balanced and great to play.

Available weapons range from something as small as a syringe

for the Paramedic all the way up to the devastating minigun for the Minigunner. Heavier weapons slow characters down and some can only be fired from a stationary position so a good balance is maintained throughout the mod. Class skins look superb and all of the 21 maps are well designed and a great deal of fun to play on. It is a bit of a hefty download but definitely worthwhile for any fan of online gaming.



5/5

For: Quake 3 Arena

Version: 2.0

Size: 140Mb

URL: www.q3f.com



For: Ghost Recon

4/5

Ghost Rec: Ghost Retard

OK, so from the title you can probably gather that it's not the most PC of mods but it's a bit of a hoot none the less. All characters from the original game have been changed to morons with some type of head trauma. Great sound effects add to the fun.



For: Serious Sam

3/5

Serious Sam: Pro-Pain 2.0

Giant robot multiplayer deathmatch mayhem for Serious Sam. Players can choose one of three weight classes for a mech, heavy, medium and superlight and then must frag the hell out of all the other players. It's quite fun but lacking in balance at the moment. Expect subsequent releases to fix this problem.

INBOX



Soldier of Fortune 2 - bloody, visceral, disturbing, fun and unmistakably PC. What other platform has the power to accurately render every gobbet of exploding flesh? What else but a GeForce4 could so lovingly render the worst perversities of violence against the human form? And so PC, we salute you.

RE-INVENTING THE WHEEL

I find, in any flight sim (and some FPSs) that I always slow down when it comes to communicating both in network play and single play (against AI). I know there are tools that cater to voice communications if you have the cash (e.g. Microsoft's Game Voice, Roger Wilco and Teamsound) but the standard package for the mute is a drop/tab menu which usually requires the player to divert attention (and fingers) away from flight/combat controls to punch numeric keys relevant to commands and such. Accepting that we won't all be able to talk I find that having to communicate by keyboard is clumsy and slow.

Why not utilize an untapped capability - the mouse wheel-button? I use the mouse for field of view (FOV) control, which I find is much better than using the FOV button on a joystick, but ignore the three mouse buttons (which while great for FPSs are not so relevant to flight sims). Would it be too much trouble for developers to program the use of these buttons? For example, initiating the communications menu with the wheel-button, scroll through the choices using the wheel, and activate the highlighted choice by punching the wheel-button again (or any combination set by the player in game options). This would allow the player to continue flying/fighting & communicating more smoothly.

Another issue, which I suspect could be supported by the mouse-wheel concept, is that of introducing a new axis to FOV movement. Presently FOV is limited to movement axis from a single point of rotation (rather akin to Terminator style head movement). In reality though, a pilot can lean forwards and backwards (to see around

pesky canopy pillars or to crane out the window in a steep turn) or even to stick his/her noggin out of the cockpit (to see around a dirty windscreen, view directly underneath or down/up the side of the aircraft). Given that we can already control FOV with the mouse would it be too much for developers to add the wheel to the equation to achieve the movement(s) outlined? For example, using the wheel-button to initiate, then rotate the wheel to lean forward or backward and then centre/sit upright by punching the wheel-button again. Seems to me it's a combination not beyond a player's ability.

Surely as sims become more capable, complex and demanding on the player's situational awareness the need for efficient coordination/control of information (i.e. communication and visibility controls to support enhanced situational awareness) will likewise increase.

**Geoff Meekan
Aashgrove QLD**

Some interesting ideas, Geoff. Perhaps you should pass them on to a developer.

CONSOLES - WHAT'S THE DEAL?

Well I'll just get to the point. Nintendo Gamecube. It is so annoying seeing all of those crappy ads showing all the games, I'm just sick of it. I mean in the end it will just turn out like the N64. It started as one of the best consoles around but after one or two years it's like no-one had ever heard of it (sorry Nintendo but that's just the way it is). A couple of days ago I went down to my local EB and saw all the stands filled with PS2, Xbox and PC games. I look a little bit harder and see half a shelf of N64 games and to top it off they

LETTER OF THE MONTH

LONG LIVE PC

In a recent introduction to a review section Daniel Wilks stated that PC releases were declining because of the release of the two new consoles (Xbox and the upcoming Gamecube we presume - Ed). I find this comment annoying and disturbing. Ok, not wake-up-in-your-sleep disturbing but still mildly-annoying disturbing.

First of all PCs will never be matched in power since most console games are designed and made on PCs.

Second is the PC's multiplayer ability. No console can match the PC's online capabilities. Imagine not being able to download mods and patches. A game gets very boring unless changes are made. The closest any console has come is the Xbox but that only supports 16 (or so Microsoft says) and if you get bored with a game or it has problems, too bad!

Console fans may point out that PCs are too expensive but I'd rather pay a couple of a hundred every few years than be hit with \$800 every time Sony decides to release a new console. As Daniel pointed out, developers are turning to consoles because of copy protection but you only have to look in the paper to see the amount of people selling copied PS2 games.

PCs have also been around a lot longer than any individual console and will always be around, giving the user the freedom to do other things than play games. PCs are superior to consoles for three reasons: power, multiplayer and upgradability. Consoles will never match this unless they bring out a really cool holographic screen.

Sean Harrop aka hippo (no I'm not obese)

We agree with you there, mate. PC will never die. It's more powerful and adaptable than any console could ever be. Unfortunately there does seem to be a decrease in the number of titles at the moment as programmers jump ship and go to Xbox. Hopefully this is only going to be a short-term fad. Long live the PC, the greatest gaming machine of them all.

were all pre-owned games. There were still only about seven games there. Also I went down to K-Mart and asked if they had any games for N64 and do you know what they said? "No sorry we don't order them anymore."

How disgraceful.

I also have the following questions:

1. Will Deus Ex 2 be the best game around? (Well, in your opinion)
2. When will Grand Theft Auto 3 be coming to PC?
3. Is it true that the PC version of GTA 3 will have the flamethrower shoot water instead of fire.

Adam Rees
Western Australia

As far as the Gamecube is concerned, I guess only time will tell. Judging by the preliminary interest, there's a good chance it will be around for some time to come. As for your other questions:

1. Of course, until the next best game ever comes out
2. It's being released in late May in the States so we should be able to expect it quite soon after (providing the censorship office doesn't kick up some type of stink)
3. Not that we've heard but we'll do some checking for you

GENERATION GAP

Hi guys, I'm having a problem. There's a gap in my PC - the terrifying generation gap. No matter how many times I blow a wad of cash on my PC, I always seem to be at least one generation behind as far as hardware is concerned (two if you count my Video Card). I bought myself a KT266 MoBo for my Athlon 1GHz and a nice new GeForce 2 Ultra to go with it. Now, less than four months later I find there's the KT333 MoBo, Athlon 2100+ (they don't even sell 1GHz Athlons anymore, just Durons) and GeForce 4 Ti4200 for roughly the same prices I paid for my parts when they came out. What do I have to do to stay current? Do I need to buy a new PC every week to stay ahead of the Joneses?

J Matiseni
Sydney NSW

Steady on there J. The system you have sounds pretty good to us here at PCPP - better than some of the machines we have at home. Nothing will ever remain top of the line for more than a few weeks or months at most. That's what progress is all about. Be happy with what you have. If it plays your games then that's all you need.

SCREENSHOT BLUES

I would just like to suggest you mix the way the PC reviews are set out with the Xbox review set out. The little thumbnails at the top of the Xbox reviews are a good idea for the PC reviews too (as well as the larger pictures). Also, some of the pictures from some of the reviews seem to be copied from the site the game is on (like a few of the Diablo 2 ones among others). Do the reviewers actually not play the games for more than an hour, leaving too little time to get proper screenshots?

murraytheuberskull

Do I call you Murray or Skull? Anyway, as far as screen shots are concerned we endeavor to take all of our own but sometimes time restraints, network restraints or clashes between the game code and screen grabber mean that we can't. Sorry about that.

WHO'S HAND IS IT ANYWAY?

What the hell is up with so called ergonomic design? Lumps, bumps and strangely molded flanges do not comfort me in my experience. I've been burned a number of times in the past buying something that says it's built for comfort, case in point being the new Intellimouse Explorer. What's up with the strange lump at the back? It's not comfortable - all it does is elevate my hand to such a point that it causes stress on my shoulder. I must be sounding like a real whinger at the moment but I really want to know who the mysterious "average user" is that all these ergonomic devices are actually made for. Do they just test bunch of normal people they pull off the street or are there three deformed Morlocks working in the design department who feel that the mouse/gamepad/joystick/whatever feels good in their ape-like hands? I have an idea. Why not try to market something with a soft gel grip that will actually mould itself to your hand - like a tiny waterbed that can track surfaces. It would work with all sorts of hands, not just "average" ones. I sure as hell know I'd buy one, no matter the price.

Andrew Sewell
Brisbane QLD

Different hands like different things. The PCPP crew think that your soft gel cushioned mouse is a corker of an idea. Fragging people with tiny little waterbeds is definitely an appealing concept.

FROM THE FORUMS



It was shocking to see that 19-year-old go on a killing spree in Germany the other day. This morning, however, I was not surprised to see news articles referring to police finding (rough quote here) "in his apartment, enough rounds to kill hundreds of people and violent computer games". It's not a 100% accurate quote, but you get the idea. Germany's gun controls are apparently quite strict, so I'm puzzled as to why they are turning attention to games when they should be wondering how the hell a 19-year-old got his hands on four (count them!) separate guns and ammunition to boot. I have a feeling they were all licensed. One of these days, they'll bust down the door of some maniac who just went on a rampage and will find a pile of AD&D books, maybe some Cult of Cthulu or Werewolf stuff. We'll see RPGers in the spotlight next. The good thing with RPG books is that they often hold a disclaimer - something along the lines of "It's just a game." Do we need an obvious statement like that plastered on games?

The Doz

I was just about to make this post myself. Just heard on the radio that violent games are indeed being blamed for this latest violence. I wonder if I can embezzle some company for millions and blame the fact that I played a lot of tycoon style games. Could I get off as surely I could not be responsible for my own actions if I play computer games? They make people "crazy" and unable to control themselves. I wonder what percentage of teenagers do not play computer games (and let's face it, most are violent). The odds are that most teenagers do at some time, therefore the chances of finding some lunatic who commits a crime and does not play video games would be very low indeed. I wonder what his parents were doing while he was putting together his little arsenal.

anzacjack

Russians Ate My Brain

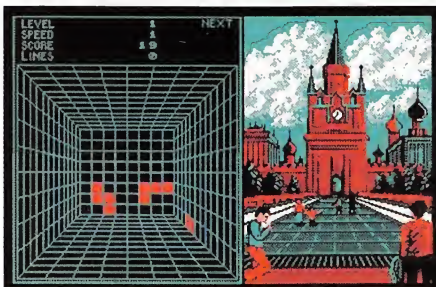
During the last days of the Red Scare in the mid 80s a strange phenomenon took the world by storm, emerging from behind the Iron Curtain and spreading like ebola at a camp for hemophiliacs. Created in 1985 by communist computer student, Alexey Pazhitnov, Tetris was, and still remains one of the most popular games in the world, copied countless times and mutated into various different forms. No matter what shape the game took, one thing remained all too constant - Tetris and its clones had the insidious power to instantly addict the user and cause them to want more and more.

I had my first Tetris experience around my 12th birthday. It's a day I will never forget; the size and shape of different coloured blocks is permanently burned into the back of my retina from far too many hours spent staring at my fix. To this day the all too Russian images of a Cessna landing in Red Square or Gagarin in space haunt my dreams. I can't listen to music without hearing the repetitive clicking and beeping or my dark mistress. Why, I hear you ask, does Tetris haunt me so? For one simple reason - Tetris ate my life. Sure, it started small, but so do all addictions. I played in my spare time, sometimes at home, sometimes at the arcades. Soon I started finding myself deliberately making free time to play. It was all I would do when I got home from school and on weekends. After a few months I found myself dissatisfied with Tetris. The challenge was gone. When I played I could frequently get scores in the millions. Where was the rush? I definitely needed something stronger.

I found what I needed in Pentris, a

permutation of the game where blocks were made up of five squares instead of four. It was fun while it lasted but only a mild buzz. One game could keep me going for a few hours but nothing more. Add to that the fact that if you remove a few letters from the title, it becomes Penis and you have my reasons for leaving that behind. Soon came Tritis, a head-to-head-to-head version of the original and then Welltris, a 3D clone where pieces fell down the sides of a forced perspective well and the player had to fit the pieces together on a flat plain. Again I felt cheated. These games were good, even great, but they still left me feeling empty. In my desperation to recapture the feeling I had when I first booted up, I even dabbled in Porntris, a clone in which naked people replaced the standard blocks.

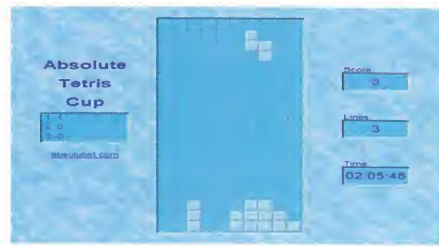
Since the fateful day I first played Tetris, I have been but a shell of a man, a sham, a support mechanism for a dangerous habit. I've been clean for a couple of years now but I know that one day I will return to the cathode ray nipple and suckle at the sweet milk of Russian invention. I'm a Tetris junkie.



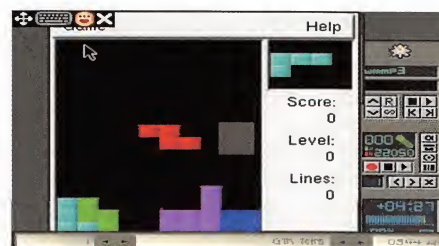
Wonderful world o' Welltris



Thrilling action sequences



Blood and guts galore



Who are we trying to kid?

POWERPLAY'S PAST

PCPP#15, AUGUST 1997

Issue #15 brought us a range of information, from a dead-serious look at the nature and effect of sex and violence in computer games all the way down to a fantastic feature review of the newly released Carmageddon. Also featured in the issue was a look at the new innovations to be found in 3D sound and Ben Mansill gave us all an in-depth report about the ins and outs of the gaming industry with his comprehensive E3 coverage.



Games reviewed ranged from the well known, like Carmageddon and X-Com Apocalypse to the relatively unknown. Has anyone ever heard of Rocket Jockey?

What We Said:

"The claim that violence breeds more violence is a seemingly logical and plausible notion yet is not supported by repeatable evidence." Simon Gruer on Sex, Lies and Videogames

"It's heeere...For the next few months the streets will be free of socially challenged nerdyfreaks (you know, me, you, everyone cool you know...), because they'll all be inside playing X-Com Apocalypse." Peter Sharpe on X-Com Apocalypse, obviously.



REVIEWED

Carmageddon	90%
Constructor	84%
G-Nome	80%



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PC *PowerPlay*

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- ♦ Selectable fan speed control
- ♦ Thumbscrew
- ♦ 490x210x450mm
- ♦ 12 total bay 4x 5.25", 3x3.5", 5x3.5 Hidden



PC-70
Silver full aluminium anodised \$539 RRP



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- ♦ 2 rear ball bearing fan
- ♦ Selectable fan speed control
- ♦ Thumbscrew
- ♦ 210X595X588mm. Suitable for dual CPU M/B.
- ♦ 15 total bay



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\$199 RRP



PC-6 Economic
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\$199 RRP

- ♦ 2 front fans with filter
- ♦ 1 rear fan
- ♦ Selectable fan speed control
- ♦ Thumbscrew
- ♦ 490x210x450mm
- ♦ 12 total bay 4x 5.25", 3x3.5", 5x3.5 Hidden

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♦ SCA-2 backplane module
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♦ Thumbscrew
♦ 589x209x574mm
♦ 13 total bays
\$790 RRP



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♦ On SCA version: SCA-2 Hot Swap bays, Support Ultra 160, SCA-2 backplane module
\$1190 RRP, SCA \$1390 RRP



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♦ 6 ball-bearing cooling fan
♦ 265x559x630mm
♦ Suitable for dual CPU M/B
\$990 RRP



PC-78
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♦ 20 total device bays
6x5.25,2x3.5,12x3.5 hidden for HDD
♦ 4x 8cm two ball-bearing fan
2x 12cm two ball-bearing fan
♦ Suitable for dual CPU M/B (Max size: 12x13)
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DVD GUIDE

Well, this is the fourth DVD PowerPlay to make it into your hot little hands, and one thing we know even at this early stage is that the DVD version of the mag has been received well. Very well, exceeding even our optimistic expectations. And so we press on, bringing you exclusive demos, the latest mods, essential patches and utilities, and of course a free anime episode every month. So you can take time out from the PC, pop down to the lounge and watch a bunch of big-eyed beauties beat the crap out of alien scum in full Dolby 5.1 surround.

The big news this month is of course the release of the Dungeon Siege demo. As demos go, this one is pretty generous - it's five per cent of the entire game, both singleplayer and multiplayer campaigns. And just think, if this is only 5% of the game, imagine what the full version must be like! Not only that, for those of you who bought the DVD version, you also get an extra special bonus DS demo, which is 10% of the multiplayer campaign.

Dungeon Siege is great, but that's not to say there isn't a whole bunch of other really cool stuff on the discs. Cast your eyes over these four pages to get the rundown, and don't forget DVD-buyer, everything on the CD pages is also included on your DVD.

Finally, we love to get suggestions, requests and even demands. Please remember to include a URL if you find something cool that you couldn't be arsed downloading, and we'll nab it for you! Good hunting!

Paul Noone

DVD and CD Producer
cdgod@next.com.au



FREE ANIME! COWBOY BEBOP EPISODE 1

Distributor: Madman

Duration: 25 minutes

Notes: Works on set-top DVD player or on a PC with software DVD player installed

Naturally when you come to write a new anime series you take the best elements of spacecruisers, bounty hunters, evil gooey aliens and bebop. Harking back to the days of the Harlem Jazz scene and also harking forward to the days of faster-than-light space travel and robeasts (thanks Voltron), Cowboy Bebop is basically an excuse for the creator to combine a whole bunch of cool ideas he had, and come up with what is a fairly decent show.

As always, this is the entire first episode, free for your delectation, in which a bunch of stuff is set up, a bunch of characters are introduced, and a

bunch of stuff happens. Involving a villain. And a dog named Ein, presumably because there's only one of him. There are also a bunch of really pretty girls with big eyes and difficult personal problems. Anyway check it out.





DUNGEON SIEGE

Bonus Multiplayer Demo

Developer: Gas Powered Games
Distributor: Microsoft
Notes: Special bonus DVD demo 10% of the multiplayer world

Further examination of DS following last month's rather scathing review has revealed a game that is less like Diablo2 and more like Ultima Online, especially in regard to its basic gameplay dynamic. Which is why we've included this special multiplayer only demo along with the exclusive singleplayer demo found on CD01. Gang up with a bunch of like-minded DVD PowerPlay readers and take down those devilish Krug and their brutish doggies. Any amusing Krug anecdotes would be warmly welcomed ...

Need: P3-500, 64Mb RAM, 32Mb GeForce2, 500Mb HDD



SOLDIER OF FORTUNE 2

Developer: Ravensoft
Distributor: Activision
Notes: Multiplayer test only, not a true demo so no judging!

And now another fabulous multiplayer test in which you can indulge in your suppressed fantasy of blowing your best mate's guts out through his ears.

Take the field of combat. Stalk through beautifully rendered forest complete with rustling undergrowth and rabbits. Fire off a wild burst at a bunch of bird startled into flight. Then watch as your arm gets blown off and the blood fountains out, every corpuscle lovingly rendered. This game works best with a GeForce4, because with the advanced features of this card, you can actually see your opponent's eyes pop and the goo splash out when you set fire to them with napalm.

Need: P3-500, 64Mb RAM, 32Mb GeForce2, 500Mb HDD



TACHYON

Updated demo!

Developer: We forget
Distributor: Don't know
Notes: An oldie but a goodie - Bruce Campbell rides again!

"Yeah I coulda been King, but in my own way, I am the king." Pause for dramatic tension. "Hail to the King baby." Kiss woman with manly lust. So ends the proper ending of Evil Dead 2, starring the king of B-grade horror, Bruce Campbell. How is this relevant? Well, Bruce kindly provided the voice of the main character for Tachyon: The Fringe, an oldish space combat game in the vein of a slightly cheesier version of Freespace. A new demo recently appeared offering a bigger bite of this classic, so check it out.

Need: Celeron 366, 32Mb RAM, TNT, 200Mb HDD



WARLORDS 2

Australian made!

Developer: SSG
Distributor: Ubi Soft
Notes: It's strategic, fantasy, and 100% Australian Made!

SSG is a legend in the industry, and the developer has been around. And when we around, we mean around. Anyway, their latest in the low-key but solid Warlords series is here and updates everything Warlord lovers have come to... well, to love. Minions, heroes, spells, special items, little bitmapped creatures, vast maps and a complex and rewarding combat system MAY all be included in this demo, but you'll never never know if you never never install the damn thing.

Need: Celeron 450, 64Mb RAM, 16Mb videocard, 300Mb HDD



3DMARK 2001 SE

New version!!

Developer: Madonion
URL: www.madonion.com
Notes: Upgrade to the full version for peanuts!

So you think your beast is beastier than your mate's beast? Well now you can prove it. Install this helpful, industry-standard benchmarking utility and watch

some flashy graphics including a totally sweet Matrix-inspired lobby shoot-out. Then, examine your final benchmark score, hit the website and see how you match up against 133+ hax0rz from around the world. Oh and if you don't quite get 42,000 3DMarks, don't worry - those people who do are cheating.

Need: A beast to call your own and use to impress your mates

jonesy's MP3 V@ULT

It's crazy!

Compiler: the_jonesy
Duration: 45 minutes
Notes: A collection of user-created MP3s and PCPP-inspired music

Well hey, if those stuck up pigs at the major record companies won't listen to our music, we can get it to the people in our own way, on DVD PowerPlay! That's right, you heard right, a collection of tasty, tasty tracks from some of the finest musicians who could be bothered sending their work in. Check it out on the DVD and find out how to get YOUR creation heard.

Need: Device capable of playing MP3 files

MODS PLUS

Mods mods mods, it's all you people care about. Can we have this, do we get that, what about the other. Anyway, here's a bunch of mods both requested and found. If you have Unreal Tournament, Quake 3, Half-Life and a couple of other games, you should be able to enjoy most of these.

For the rest of this month's mods, check out CD02.

- **Coassacks: European Wars**
- **Day of Defeat 2.0**
- **FireArms 2.5**
- **Monolith's Gangland**
- **True Matrix TC 1.0**

CD GUIDE

Welcome to CD PowerPlay #75! So you're a cheapskate without a DVD drive then are you? Free anime every month and more than 3Gb of goodies not good enough for you huh? Oh well I guess we'd better throw you a bone or two. How about we start with an exclusive Dungeon Siege demo, offering 5% of the entire game, both single- and multiplayer campaigns? Alternatively, there's the admittedly quite overdue Battle Realms demo for your delectation. Folks with a deeper sense of strategy may prefer Age of Wonders 2. Or a bush bash with Master Rallye. In any case, we cater for all sorts except firstperson shooter fans - but don't worry, next month we'll have Jedi Outcast for you!

Elsewhere on the CDs, we've included the latest version of Nethack, Q3 Fortress and an awesome Jedi Outcast mod - check it out!

And of course all the regulars are there - utilities, patches, system tools and the every-important audio section, because audio is good.

So until next month, get playing!



CD01 DEMOS

Developer: Gas Powered Games
Distributor: Microsoft
Notes: Special bonus DVD demo
 10% of the multiplayer world

DUNGEON SIEGE

Massive Exclusive Demo!

It's the little action-RPG that could. Awesome graphics, awesome scope, somewhat limited in appeal, nevertheless for free you can't complain. Battle your way through several hours of gameplay - the farmlands, the crypts, all the way to Stonebridge. All the items and enemies in this section are included in the full game. It's the truest taste of DS you'll get without forking over \$90!

Need: P3-500, 64Mb RAM, 32Mb GeForce2, 500Mb HDD





AGE OF WONDERS 2

RPG strategy returns!

Developer: Elvis the singing fish
Distributor: Take2
Notes: For those who like their RPGs with brains.

The original hardly made much of a splash but it was a real and tasty alternative to the HOMM juggernaut. Crisp graphics, a gazillion options and a real sense of the epic made the original a winner, now see if AOW2 keeps up the tradition.

Need: Celeron 450, 64Mb RAM, 16Mb videocard, 200Mb HDD



MASTER RALLYE

Smash up the world!

Developer: Umm...
Distributor: Yeah...
Notes: It's rallying, but with an extra E

When is a rally not a rally? When it's a rallye. It's a different kind of race, a different class of car. And it's a tasty game. Belt around several tracks from the full version in a couple of the cars on offer. We guarantee you, it's a driving game.

Need: Duron 800, 64Mb RAM, 32Mb videocard, 400Mb HDD



OTHER DEMOS

All tasty, all chunky!

Developer: SSG
Distributor: Ubi Soft
Notes: It's strategic, fantasy, and 100% Australian Made!

Battle Realms for the young at heart, Beam Breakers for the Luc Besson fans and The Settlers: Smack a Thief for the mad. Check 'em out!

Need: Celeron 450, 64Mb RAM, 16Mb videocard, 300Mb HDD



CD02 MODS AND UTILITIES

MODS

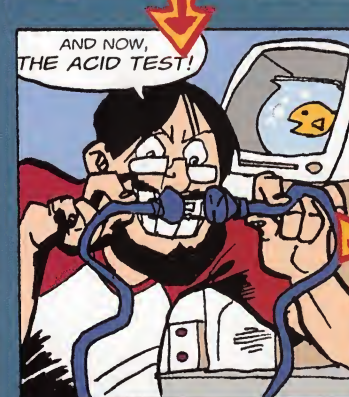
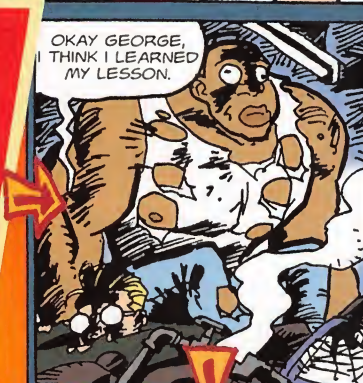
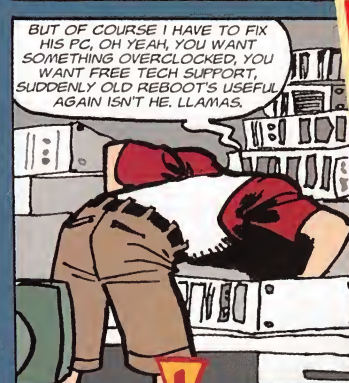
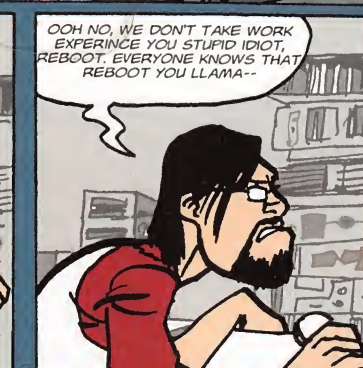
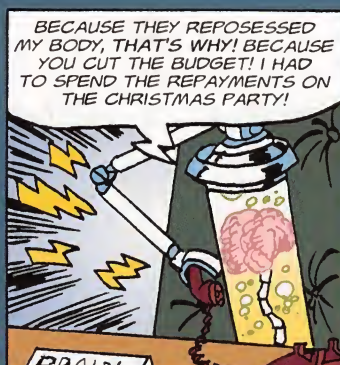
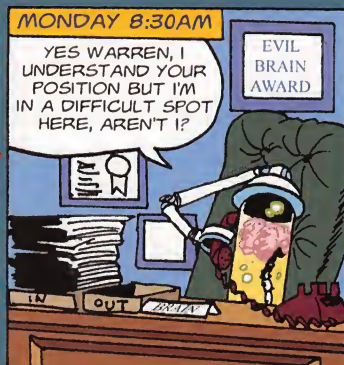
In quick succession then: Quake3 Fortress 2.0 for the bad at heart, Earth Special Forces for the sophisticated, FBJK Ultimate Mod for the Jedi masters, Ghost Retard for the politically incorrect, Nethack for the classicists, Pro-Pain for the masochistic and finally Tactical Ops for the topical. Get into them and bust a cap in someone's ass for me. Figuratively speaking. We don't condone violence. At least, not real violence.

Need: One or all of Quake3, UT, Jedi Outcast, Ghost Recon and Half-Life

PATCHES

C&C Renegade
 Half-Life 1.1.0.8
 Global Operations 1.1
 Ghost Recon 1.2.10.0
 Unreal Tournament v436





NEXT: VISIT!

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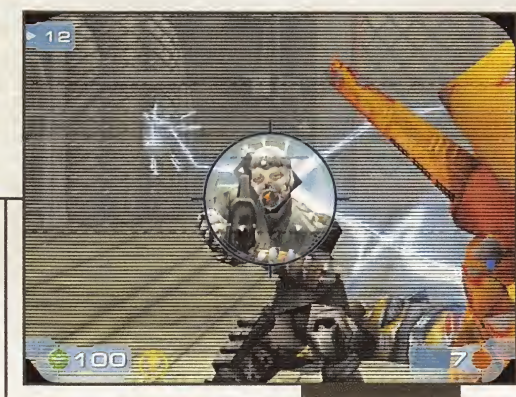
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seen before...it's the new
face of futuristic combat."

—PC Gamer



SPORTS COMBAT SERVED RAW



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